

Conference on Disarmament

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English

Final record of the one thousand two hundred and eighty-eighth plenary meeting


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President: Mr. Naziri Asl (Islamic Republic of Iran)

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The President: I call to order the 1288th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Let me start by updating you on the consultations I have held since our last meeting.

As I indicated at the last meeting, the topic for this meeting is the programme of work. I believe that the first priority for the formal start of the work of the Conference on Disarmament is to agree on the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work.

Since the previous meeting of the Conference, I have been able to hold consultations either bilaterally or through regional groups' representatives, and also through the P-6, to identify the major challenges that hinder us from reaching agreement on the programme of work of the Conference. In this regard, almost all formal and informal proposals, initiatives and drafts put forward in connection with the programme of work have been analysed. I have found that, in reaching agreement on these proposals or initiatives, two types of approaches were followed by previous presidents of the Conference on Disarmament.

According to the first approach, which is referred to as the "maximalist" approach and has been pursued by certain presidents, the Conference on Disarmament should not distance itself from its mandated role as a negotiating forum. Based on this assumption, several proposals and initiatives of the presidents of the Conference on Disarmament were submitted with a view to achieving this goal. This approach, while having its advantages, unfortunately did not enjoy consensus among members of the Conference on Disarmament. The second approach, which is most often labelled as a "pragmatic", "practical" or to some degree "simplistic" approach, sought to resume the work of the Conference on Disarmament, taking into account that the Conference has not always had a negotiating mandate for each and every item on its agenda. This approach did not rule out negotiations on the various agenda items in the future, but at the same time it did enable delegations to discuss issues at hand without being in a negotiating mode. While this approach has so far not yielded any agreements on the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament, it seems to be an option for delegations to consider.

Let me put my "national hat" on for a while and announce that, from our national point of view, my delegation would favour a negotiating mandate in the programme of work that includes a very clear reference to negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention.

Having said that, we are of the view that, while a president might have his own national priorities, when acting in his capacity as president he should seek out any ideas that would serve the interests of all members of the Conference on Disarmament, while ensuring the effectiveness of the Conference as the sole disarmament negotiating forum. In the same manner, while the Islamic Republic of Iran is seeking a negotiating mandate on nuclear disarmament, we are ready, as President of the Conference on Disarmament, to work towards a formula that promotes consensus among the delegations.

Having said that, since my priority is to work with members of the Conference on the programme of work, I would be pleased if we could have a good interactive discussion in a transparent manner at this meeting on these two approaches and on any other aspect of the programme of work. Therefore, I will split this plenary meeting into two parts. The first part will be set aside for those delegations that might wish to deliver a formal statement, while the second part will be an informal, interactive discussion on the programme of work.

So, that is the whole programme that I have. At this stage I will open the floor to the delegations that wish to comment on this issue.

I have noted that a number of delegations have asked to be included in the list of speakers. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Ireland, who is speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Kos (Ireland): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union, and the following countries align themselves with this declaration: Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Let me first welcome you to Geneva, Sir. The European Union would like to reiterate its commitment to the Conference on Disarmament and its support for the efforts of all presidents to reach an agreement on a balanced and comprehensive programme of work. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the Ambassador of Indonesia for his hard work and untiring efforts to reach consensus on a programme of work.

We are deeply concerned by the continued dysfunction of a crucial part of the disarmament machinery, namely the ongoing stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament.

The United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 67/72 on the report of the Conference on Disarmament, called upon this Conference to further intensify consultations and explore possibilities for overcoming its ongoing deadlock of well over a decade by adopting and implementing a balanced and comprehensive programme of work at the earliest possible date during its 2013 session, bearing in mind the decision on the programme of work adopted by the Conference on 29 May 2009, contained in document CD/1864, as well as other relevant proposals. It also requested that all States members cooperate with the successive presidents of the Conference in their efforts to guide the Conference to the early commencement of its substantive work, including negotiations, in its 2013 session.

It is in the hands of all members to restore the Conference on Disarmament to the central role it can play in strengthening the non-proliferation regime and multilateral disarmament. The Conference, in accordance with its mandate, has a crucial role to play in negotiating multilateral treaties. Its ongoing stalemate, despite recent attempts to achieve consensus, remains deeply troubling. In this context, we continue to urge all States to join the consensus on adopting a programme of work, which would, *inter alia*, pave the way for negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

For the European Union, the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein remain a clear priority. Such a treaty is urgently needed as a complement to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

National security concerns, while legitimate, can and should be addressed as part of the negotiating process rather than as a prerequisite. Confidence-building measures could be taken immediately, without the need to wait for the commencement of formal negotiations. In this regard, pending negotiations and the entry into force of the treaty, the European Union calls on all States concerned to declare and uphold an immediate moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

We reaffirm our commitment to engage in substantive discussions on all the other core issues set forth in document CD/1864: on practical steps for progressive and systematic efforts to reduce nuclear weapons with the ultimate goal of their elimination, including approaches to potential future work of a multilateral character; on all issues related to the prevention of an arms race in outer space; and on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as on other issues.

We would also like to reiterate European Union member States' long-standing commitment to the enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament. In line with General Assembly resolution 67/72, we underline the importance of continuing consultations on the expansion of the membership and strongly support appointing a special coordinator on the expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament.

Consistent with our engagement with civil society, we are looking forward to enhanced interaction between civil society and the Conference on Disarmament, thus strengthening the contribution of NGOs and research institutions to the work of the Conference.

We welcome your indications, Mr. President, of your intention to consult the members of the Conference on Disarmament on these issues.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm our strong commitment to the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community. It is clear that the adoption of a programme of work will require sustained political efforts from all of us. If the current standstill continues, the debate will increasingly focus on other options that may allow States to make progress in respect of multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament. The remaining part of 2013 could still be used effectively to put the Conference on Disarmament back on track. We urge all members of the Conference to engage constructively, and we will do the same.

The President: I thank the representative of Ireland for his statement on behalf of the European Union and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of France, Ambassador Simon-Michel.

Mr. Simon-Michel (France) (*spoke in French*): France fully aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I would also like to take this opportunity to outline my country's priorities regarding the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament.

You are aware of France's commitment to the Conference on Disarmament, the sole disarmament negotiating body. It was in this Conference that the major multilateral disarmament treaties dealing with weapons of mass destruction were developed. It is in this Conference that we shall continue such progress by striving for general and complete disarmament and a safer world for all. The adoption of a programme of work, which would enable the Conference on Disarmament to overcome its difficulties, is critical in this regard.

The negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty is the priority for France. It is the next logical step in terms of nuclear disarmament. After having restricted qualitative improvements in weapons by banning nuclear tests, it is now our responsibility to restrict quantitative improvements by addressing the basic materials of weapons, that is to say fissile material. It was this reasoning which led the Conference, some 16 years ago, to focus on these negotiations. Only one State at present opposes the launch of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament.

We all know that there are many views on the various aspects of the treaty. Document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein managed to strike an appropriate balance between those different points of view, a widely accepted balance. Document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein have been incorporated into all the programmes of work adopted or proposed in the Conference on Disarmament. This document is also clearly taken up in United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/53. Document CD/1299 must therefore remain the point of reference.

The negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty must feature within the framework of a balanced and comprehensive programme. The programme of work contained in document CD/1864 adopted in May 2009 under the presidency of Algeria remains the

document of reference. It was the last programme of work adopted by consensus; therefore it was agreed to by all in 2009. Document CD/1864 should also clearly form the basis of our work in the context of paragraph 3 of United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/72.

This document gives a clear mandate to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material and paves the way for discussion of the other main issues in the Conference on Disarmament.

Document CD/1864 of 2009 was also the model that inspired the 2010 plan of action of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to which the vast majority of us subscribed and which is our road map with regard to nuclear disarmament until 2015. The treaty's plan of action clearly sets forth the negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material as the most urgent priority, which must begin "immediately". The fissile material cut-off treaty is the only one of the four main items on which the 2010 NPT action plan calls for negotiation. It is therefore our responsibility to respect the commitments made within the framework of a treaty, the NPT, which is the cornerstone of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that we will spare no effort to get the Conference on Disarmament back to work. To that end, my country has shown flexibility in considering various versions of the programme of work since 2009 and will continue to do so, provided that the few elements I outlined above are respected.

Mr. Reindel (Germany): Mr. President, Germany fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. On behalf of the German delegation, I would like to welcome you to Geneva. Since the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament rotates in alphabetical order, you are confronted with the challenge of assuming the presidency right after you have taken up your post in Geneva. This is a demanding task, and we wish you all the best for its successful conclusion.

Mr. President, the German delegation has always taken the view that it is an important task for every president of the Conference on Disarmament to make an effort to reach consensus on a programme of work. Therefore, we cannot but welcome your stated intention to approach your presidency in this spirit. You can count on the full support of the German delegation in this endeavour.

As a result of the deadlock that is now reaching its seventeenth year, the Conference on Disarmament is in a critical state. A direct result of this state of affairs is the establishment of the Open-Ended Working Group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. The establishment of this working group was supported by an impressive majority of Member States in the United Nations General Assembly. It has recently taken up its substantive work in Geneva, and it will report on its work to the next United Nations General Assembly.

While Germany actively participates in the Open-Ended Working Group, we continue to believe that a revitalized Conference on Disarmament would be highly desirable. It would provide a suitable framework for making tangible progress in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

However, this requires that the Conference on Disarmament should finally get its act together.

Many attempts have been made to agree on a programme of work, which would allow the Conference on Disarmament to do the work it is meant to do, namely to develop new treaties in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. I will point out two examples from the recent past:

First, there is the programme of work contained in document CD/1864 of 29 May 2009, which was actually adopted under the presidency of Algeria by consensus but, unfortunately, was never implemented.

Second, there is the draft programme of work contained in document CD/1933/Rev.I of 14 March 2012, which was tabled for adoption by the presidency of Egypt and was objected to by only one delegation.

Both cases clearly demonstrate that in the recent past the Conference on Disarmament has come very close to starting its work. Therefore, in our opinion, we would be well advised to build on the approach reflected in both of these documents.

Both texts cover all core issues on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, from nuclear disarmament to the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Like other States, Germany is fully prepared to deal substantively with all these issues, because we regard all of them as important in our collective efforts to strengthen international security.

These two programmes of work are also similar in operational terms. They seek the establishment of a working group to focus on a multilateral, verifiable and non-discriminatory treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Germany regards the early conclusion of such a treaty as an important building block on the road to a world without nuclear weapons – a goal we should all be committed to. In our view, such a treaty would be most relevant in terms of both disarmament and non-proliferation.

One could ask, why does the Conference on Disarmament need a programme of work in the first place?

The purpose of a programme of work is to give the Conference on Disarmament clear guidance about what to do operationally. If we continue to seek an approach along the lines that I have just tried to describe, we will provide this type of overall operational guidance. But, as happens so often in diplomacy, it will only be possible if all sides are ready to abandon the search for an ideal solution, as ideal solutions will nearly always be mutually exclusive. Instead, we should focus on the common ground of workable and consensual compromises.

Mr. Yamamoto (Japan): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Ambassador Naziri Asl, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I can assure you of my delegation's utmost cooperation throughout your presidency.

Mr. President, we have a collective responsibility to meet the international community's expectations of this body, and I commend your effort to try to lift the Conference on Disarmament out of its long-standing stalemate. After carefully studying last week's discussion on a programme of work, I would like to briefly state Japan's position.

When I listen to discussions in this chamber or elsewhere, such as the Open-Ended Working Group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, I sense that the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons is widely shared by the international community. There are different approaches to reaching that ultimate end, however. In this matter, Japan believes that continuing the steady accumulation of practical nuclear disarmament and confidence-building measures is the way forward. If we are to seriously consider the inhumane nature of the use of nuclear weapons, we need to be pragmatic and realistic in tackling these issues in order to achieve our common goal.

Among the many possible measures that could be implemented, Japan attaches particular importance to a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear

weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, on which negotiations should commence immediately. With the help of document CD/1299, this Conference provides a suitable forum for such negotiations, and the wide support for adopting such a legally binding treaty is apparent from the many statements, documents and resolutions within the Conference on Disarmament, the United Nations General Assembly and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I would also like to reiterate that this Conference once agreed on a programme of work for such negotiations, namely document CD/1864. Although all the core issues are significant, the priority that Japan attaches to a fissile material cut-off treaty has been unwavering. We hope that this will be considered in a future programme of work.

The President: I thank the representative of Japan for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is Ambassador Manzou of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Manzou (Zimbabwe): Mr. President, the Group of 21 has no intention of making a substantive statement under this agenda item. But since this is the first time we are taking the floor under your presidency, allow us to make the following remarks.

The Group of 21 warmly welcomes you to Geneva and wishes you a very successful and enjoyable tour of duty in Geneva.

The Group of 21 takes this opportunity to congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran for assuming the rotating presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and for the able manner in which you are guiding our work during this session.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a fellow member of our group, the Group of 21, and the current Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement. We have no doubt that you will steer the Conference on Disarmament in an able manner so as to take its work forward.

We thank you for the briefing that you have given us this morning. The Group of 21 welcomes the proposals that you have made with regard to efforts to come up with a programme of work in order for the Conference on Disarmament to resume its substantive work.

The Group also appreciates your pledge to carry out your consultations in an open, transparent and inclusive manner. We look forward to your interactions with the Group during the consultative process.

The Group would also like to express its appreciation for the efforts undertaken by your predecessor, the representative of Indonesia – another fellow member of our Group. The Group of 21 expresses its appreciation for the intensive consultations conducted by Indonesia on the programme of work. The seminar entitled “Exploring avenues to address the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament” which was organized by Indonesia in cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research was pertinent. The Group also greatly appreciated the work that was conducted by the Indian presidency, which conducted extensive consultations in an open and transparent manner.

Mr. President, let me conclude by expressing the Group’s solidarity with you and its full support for your efforts to end the long-standing impasse in the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank Ambassador Manzou of Zimbabwe for his statement on behalf of the G-21 and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. van den IJssel (Netherlands): Mr. President, let me start by aligning myself with the European Union statement delivered earlier. I would also like to align myself with the speaker’s words of welcome to you and his thanks to the outgoing Indonesian presidency for its efforts and hard work.

Mr. President, you have asked us to present our views on the issue of a programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament.

Like many others inside and outside this chamber, we are deeply frustrated about the continuing stagnation of the Conference. Every week, month and year that goes by without conducting meaningful work translates into the further erosion of this body and a further loss of what remains of its credibility. In our view, it is not attempts to start discussing disarmament issues in other forums that are to blame; rather, it is the status quo, the stagnation in the Conference on Disarmament itself, that is responsible for the current situation.

As to the issue of the programme of work, we are pragmatic. For us, agreement on a programme of work is not a goal in itself but a means to start meaningful substantive work. A programme of work is and should be a mere tool, an enabling instrument at best. The goal is to get to work in the Conference on Disarmament on the issue of nuclear disarmament. For us, that means that we should start negotiations on meaningful instruments that will further that cause.

We would therefore find it problematic to support the adoption of a programme of work that lacks substance in the sense that it will not bring us closer to the start of such negotiations – a programme of work that is just providing us with a discussion mandate. Do we need a programme of work to discuss issues? As I said before, a programme of work is a tool, not an end in itself. We could not see the adoption of such a minimal programme of work as proof that the Conference on Disarmament is making progress.

On many occasions, we have expressed our belief that the issue of fissile material is the topic for which there is most support for starting negotiations. The 2010 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review Conference action plan, voting patterns in the First Committee and our discussions here in the Conference on Disarmament are ample proof of that. Therefore, it has been and still is our position that we should start negotiations on this issue as soon as possible. We also continue to believe that the mandate for such negotiations contained in document CD/1299 offers a broad enough basis to allow anyone to raise specific points or concerns during the negotiations.

As to the exact wording of such a programme of work, we are flexible. The Netherlands has supported all the proposals to that effect in recent years that different presidents have submitted to the Conference on Disarmament.

A few words about the Conference on Disarmament itself: last week we heard a number of delegations emphasize the important role of the Conference. We do not disagree that the Conference has been important in the past but, in the last 15 or 16 years, we have seen no results. For us, it is not so much the stagnation in the Conference on Disarmament that frustrates us but rather the lack of meaningful progress in relation to multilateral approaches to nuclear disarmament. Preserving the Conference on Disarmament should not be our primary objective; making real progress should be. We still believe and hope that the Conference on Disarmament can play a meaningful role, but we are open to alternative approaches. In principle, we are interested in all possibilities that might really take us forward; the forum in which such negotiations would take place is, in our view, of lesser importance.

Mr. Järviaho (Finland): Mr. President, let me welcome you to Geneva and to the Conference on Disarmament. Finland held the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament exactly one year ago, so we understand the challenges that it may pose.

Finland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the European Union.

Finland has been and is fully prepared to proceed on all four core issues in a balanced and equitable manner, with our own preference being to commence negotiations

on a fissile material cut-off treaty. A fissile material cut-off treaty would be the next step towards our common goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Having said that, we of course also fully understand that others have different priorities.

The programme of work is a major balancing act between the different interests of the members of the Conference on Disarmament. A balanced and comprehensive programme of work was formulated in 2009 and set forth in document CD/1864, but unfortunately it was never implemented. Several attempts have been made since then, without success.

We appreciate the recent attempts by Hungary and Indonesia to find a consensus on a programme of work and a way out of the deadlock during their presidencies.

We have the consensus rule here in the Conference on Disarmament, which is intended to ensure that no one's security interests are jeopardized. However, if we wish to get our work started, much more flexibility is needed on the part of all members of the Conference.

As it seems to be very difficult, for the time being, to break the stalemate, we see value in looking into the Conference's working methods and ways of revitalizing it, as proposed by Switzerland and others. We should modernize the Conference. For instance, we should address issues relating to its membership, the participation of civil society, the agenda and the rotation of the presidency.

The Conference is an invaluable vehicle for disarmament, but only if it runs; otherwise, it may end up in the garage.

Ms. Mehta (India): Mr. President, this is the first time that my delegation has taken the floor in a Conference on Disarmament plenary meeting under your presidency, so allow me first of all to congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran on assuming the stewardship of this forum. Our work in the Conference on Disarmament will surely benefit from your vast experience in the field of multilateral disarmament affairs. Please be assured of our full cooperation in the discharge of your important responsibilities.

We would like to thank you for sharing your thoughts with us today and at our previous plenary meeting on the Conference and on the importance of agreeing on a programme of work.

My country's position regarding the importance of the Conference as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum has been reiterated several times and is well known. Our national priorities have been reaffirmed on many occasions.

Nuclear disarmament continues to be our highest priority. Without prejudice to this priority, we support negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on an FMCT in accordance with the agreed mandate. We would like to see the Conference return to its substantive work on the basis of a consensus programme of work. Through such an approach, the role of the Conference as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum would be upheld and strengthened.

The Conference on Disarmament and its rules of procedure afford members the appropriate venue and the confidence to undertake negotiations on subjects that have an impact on national security. We all have security concerns that relate to a variety of developments in and outside the Conference. What is important is that the Conference's rules of procedure and its established practice allow us to protect such interests while advancing shared and agreed multilateral priorities concerning international agreements that would enhance both international and national security.

The Conference on Disarmament provides a means of achieving both goals in a complementary manner. This is an essential attribute that reinforces the value of the Conference and places an obligation on its members to act in a manner that will enable the Conference to resume its substantive work on the basis of a consensus programme of work, just as we were poised to do in May 2009 on the basis of document CD/1864.

At the conclusion of my country's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament earlier this year, I outlined my delegation's views on the prospects for adopting a programme of work which would be in line with the Conference's role as the forum for the negotiation of disarmament treaties of universal applicability by consensus. There are developments on the margins of this forum that highlight the need to reaffirm the Conference's identity as the appropriate venue for substantive work on multilateral disarmament issues. In order to do so, India is ready to pursue substantive work, including negotiations, in accordance with a programme of work agreed on the basis of the rules of procedure that continue to guide our work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India for her statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is the distinguished representative of Cuba.

Mr. Romero Puentes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you once again on your assumption of the presidency of this forum. We are confident that your experience and abilities, particularly on issues related to disarmament, will enable important progress to be made, even in moments as difficult as these. My delegation fully supports the statement made by the Ambassador of Zimbabwe on behalf of the G-21. Cuba wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and its unstinting efforts towards achieving substantive progress at the Conference. Within the disarmament machinery, the Conference has a vital role as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. Cuba supports the optimization of the disarmament machinery, including the Conference, but we are convinced that the paralysis currently affecting much of this system is primarily due not to working methods, but rather to certain States' lack of political will to make real progress, particularly with regard to nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, we encourage you to continue your consultations with the regional groups and various States in order to gain approval for a programme of work. We believe that this should be the focus of our work. The Conference on Disarmament should adopt, at the earliest possible opportunity, a balanced and comprehensive programme of work which takes into account the real priorities in terms of disarmament and gives nuclear disarmament the attention it merits. Cuba considers that this body is ready to start immediate simultaneous negotiations on a treaty to eliminate and ban nuclear weapons, a treaty banning the arms race in outer space, a treaty providing effective security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States like Cuba, and a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear devices.

The proposal of the Ambassador of Indonesia could be a good starting point for our negotiations. Cuba believes that it is imperative for equal importance to be accorded to the four agenda items without prioritizing one issue over another or defining logical next steps that constrain the work of the Conference, which would not bring us any closer to consensus.

International security is threatened by the existence of nuclear weapons, and their total elimination is a question of survival for humanity. It is therefore a priority to move towards the elimination and absolute prohibition of the nuclear arsenal within the framework of this Conference.

Nuclear disarmament must take priority in the programme of work of the Conference. The Conference must initiate urgent negotiations on a treaty banning the

development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons that provides for their destruction and leads to the complete non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons within a given time frame.

The need to achieve the total elimination and prohibition of nuclear weapons has very broad international support. However, little progress has been made towards this goal. Humanity remains at grave risk of annihilation given the existence of more than 19,000 nuclear arms, of which 4,400 are in an operational state and 2,000 are ready for immediate use. The use of only a tiny part of the enormous global arsenal of nuclear weapons, the explosion of 100 warheads, would lead to nuclear winter with catastrophic consequences for the existence of humanity.

Against this backdrop, the commitment of this Conference to change the current state of affairs is not only an important issue, but also one of the main challenges for the survival of humankind.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Knutsson (Sweden): Mr. President, as this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor during your presidency, allow me to welcome you to Geneva and to the presidency of the Conference.

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

Like many others, Sweden has often called for a resumption of substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament. Commendable efforts have been undertaken by several presidencies in recent years, including during the current session. As we know, however, it was on document CD/1864 of 2009 that consensus on a programme of work was actually achieved. That proposal continues to be our preference.

We should also recall that a programme of work is a mechanism for embarking on substantive work, not a vehicle for solving all substantive disagreements or differences of opinion. These must be a matter for the negotiations that we seek to initiate.

The long-standing position of Sweden is that we are open to moving forward on all the core issues of the Conference. Our position is also that the negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices is foremost among these issues. We need to put a legal cap on the production of fissile material for weapons purposes and to deal appropriately with previously produced stocks.

The fissile material issue is part of the 2010 NPT Review Conference action plan and has been the subject of many General Assembly resolutions. Much preparatory work has been done on the issue, which we should be able to build upon. Substantive negotiations are overdue. A Conference on Disarmament programme of work should, therefore, include a mandate to negotiate an FMCT.

As we have stated in other forums, such as the Open-Ended Working Group, Sweden believes in a “step-by-step” or “building block” approach to nuclear disarmament. An FMCT and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are essential elements in the process involved in reaching our goal of Global Zero.

We have heard proposals for a structured process aimed at improving the Conference’s methods of work. We can see merit in this approach, and we are open to it as long as it does not become a substitute for the real work that the Conference on Disarmament is meant to be doing.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Sweden for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Rosocha (Slovakia): Mr. President, Slovakia fully associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Since this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor under your presidency, let me reaffirm my country's commitment and reiterate this delegation's readiness to engage in an endeavour that may unlock the potential of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating forum in the field of disarmament.

At the outset, I would also like to commend your predecessors in this year's session of the Conference for their determination to build a consensus on a programme of work, which would allow the Conference on Disarmament to start its substantial work and to fulfil its mandate.

We regret that this year the Conference has once again failed to meet its obligation to establish a programme of work and to commence its negotiations. Despite efforts by almost all Conference members, we have not been able to accomplish the specific tasks assigned to the Conference. The frustration felt in this forum continues, as does its stagnation.

We are disappointed that individual ambitions prevail over global security interests, thus preventing the international community from advancing on issues that would strengthen security for all.

It only stands to reason that national security interests can best be defended in the course of the negotiations. This is an appropriate place and time in which to seek consensus.

The ongoing stalemate in the Conference, its stagnation and failure to move forward on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation endanger the global security environment and the disarmament landscape in particular. We believe that the Conference is central to disarmament negotiations and is a key element of the entire disarmament machinery. It is so important that we cannot afford to let its inactivity and deadlock continue, as doing so would have serious consequences for the Conference in terms of its credibility and relevance in addressing all current security needs.

We understand that there are different priorities for the negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. In order to overcome existing differences, we need to show increased flexibility, which would generate trust and confidence and would help us to unite our views. We are convinced that this Conference is still the best place to produce global, well-founded and viable instruments. The Conference as an institution has the potential to find negotiated global solutions.

All issues on our agenda deserve careful consideration. There may be a question as to which issue, if any, is ripe for negotiations, but we will find the answer to that question only if we deal with an issue. Only if we start can we find out how far we can reach. So, we need to commence dealing with issues on our agenda as soon as possible. We are of the view that starting negotiations on one issue will not mean that the others will be neglected.

Slovakia continues to support the immediate commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We believe that it is an indispensable and practical next step towards achieving our final goal: a world free of nuclear weapons.

We share the view that such a treaty would offer a unique opportunity to create a non-discriminatory regime with equal obligations for both nuclear and non-nuclear-weapon States.

A fissile material treaty would clearly reinforce the global non-proliferation regime based on the NPT and, at the same time, complement the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. It would be part of the architecture of a nuclear-weapon-free world. We believe that

such a treaty would be well placed in a comprehensive framework of mutually reinforcing instruments.

Slovakia believes that the scope of the treaty should be determined by definitions set out in the treaty. It must be broad enough to ensure that all fissile material that is usable for nuclear weapons purposes is covered by its provisions.

We should work to maximize the non-proliferation and disarmament value of this instrument.

Mr. Wilson (Australia): Mr. President, I join others in welcoming you to Geneva.

Australia has consistently made known its views on the substantive work that the Conference on Disarmament should be doing. Australia attaches great importance to the implementation of the 2010 NPT Review Conference action plan, and again recalls the three actions that relate to the work of the Conference: action 6 on nuclear disarmament; action 7 on nuclear security assurances; and action 15 on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. These actions should be pursued, without forgetting, of course, the Conference on Disarmament's fourth core issue on outer space.

Australia believes that all States parties to the NPT should remain actively committed to the implementation of actions 6, 7 and 15 and, indeed, of the rest of the action plan.

It is a matter of record that Australia places particular, though not exclusive, importance on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices as an essential, pragmatic, early and now long-overdue measure in support of the broader goal of achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons.

Our delegation spoke on this matter in the Conference on Disarmament on 12 March, and I do not propose to repeat the remarks that we made at that time, but I do wish to underline our view that the Shannon mandate contained in document CD/1299 remains relevant as a forward-looking initiative that could serve as the starting point for substantive work on this issue and would allow all interests to be voiced in the context of treaty negotiations.

Mr. Khelif (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, the Algerian delegation firstly wishes to align itself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Zimbabwe on behalf of the Group of 21, and wishes to support you in your efforts to attempt to find a solution to the problem facing us in the Conference, one which is acceptable to all and for all.

Each year we reaffirm the key role of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body. But the problem is that we have not restarted any negotiations within the Conference since 1996, and this protracted state of affairs creates a palpable sense of frustration. This frustration is not born out of the deadlock in the Conference itself, but the fact that it is nuclear disarmament which is really being held hostage. That is why it is necessary for us to find a way so that we can restart the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We believe that the United Nations General Assembly established the Open-Ended Working Group to draw up proposals to take forward multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament because there is a problem within the Conference on Disarmament.

We held discussions last month in this Group, very fruitful discussions, as a result of which we have been able to draw up a list of various possible options to restart negotiations on nuclear disarmament. We hope that this state of mind within the Open-Ended Working

Group can have an effect on the Conference on Disarmament. That is why, Mr. President, we have asked to take the floor: to encourage you to continue your consultations with a view to finding a framework which enables us to resume these discussions within the Working Group and at least draw on the contributions to these discussions within the Conference on Disarmament regarding the various issues facing the Conference. The Algerian delegation wishes to point out in that regard that you have in the Conference decision CD/1864, which was adopted under the presidency of my country by consensus, and which has been mentioned by a number of delegations. It continues to represent a solid foundation from which to attempt to find a solution. You also have the various subsequent proposals, the last of which was made by Indonesia, that also provides avenues to allow us to try and reflect on a programme of work.

Waiting for us to be able to agree on the negotiating mandates on the issues facing the Conference does not prevent us from trying a perhaps more flexible, less demanding approach than that contained in document CD/1864 or the other proposals, a simplified approach that will provide us with slightly broader mandates on the four major issues and on the other matters on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, so that we can at least launch a process of review, a discussion, to consider the various issues and prepare the ground for future negotiations.

That was what the Algerian delegation wished to cover today. It reaffirms its support for undertaking this work with all the delegations, of course, in order to find a framework that allows us to restart the work of the Conference at the earliest possible opportunity.

The President: I thank the representative of Algeria for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Combrink (South Africa): Mr. President, at the outset permit me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

In particular, we would like to thank you and your predecessors for your dedication and your efforts to find a formula for a programme of work that would allow the Conference on Disarmament to break out of its long-standing stalemate and resume the substantive work for which it was created, namely the negotiation of international instruments in the field of disarmament.

The adoption of a programme of work should, in our view, remain our primary objective.

Let us also associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Zimbabwe on behalf of the Group of 21.

Ever since South Africa became a member of the Conference on Disarmament, my delegation has always sought to display the highest possible degree of flexibility in our approach to the annual programme of work of the Conference. Despite the serious concerns raised by my delegation during the consultations on draft decision CD/1948, my delegation stood ready to join a possible consensus on the adoption of that draft decision.

Since consensus on the adoption of draft decision CD/1948 could not be achieved, let me outline our positions once again.

We have long supported the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material treaty that would serve both disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. However, we do not believe that such a treaty is the only issue that requires attention on the road towards a nuclear-weapon-free world, nor do we believe that a treaty that excluded provisions on fissile material stocks would make a meaningful contribution to the goal of nuclear disarmament. While the reference to document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein provides no assurance that stocks

will be included in a future fissile material treaty, we nevertheless remain ready to engage in unconditional negotiations on such a treaty.

The idea of undertaking deliberations on the issues of nuclear disarmament and a fissile material treaty within the framework of a single subsidiary body was an innovative idea that we were willing to accept. However, the linkage created between the two issues in terms of the mandate of the subsidiary body unfortunately, and perhaps unintentionally, introduced a concept that is not acceptable to my delegation, especially in view of our own past experience. While we are ready to start negotiations on a fissile material treaty as an undeniably important step towards nuclear disarmament, progress on this issue should never become a precondition for other nuclear disarmament steps to follow.

South Africa is unequivocally committed to nuclear disarmament and to the achievement and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons. The indiscriminate nature and vast humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons compel us to continue our quest for their total elimination.

We are convinced that neither the possession of nuclear weapons nor the pursuit of such capabilities can enhance international peace and security. The primary responsibility for the elimination of nuclear weapons lies with those States that continue to rely on nuclear weapons for their security. It is therefore incumbent upon these States to engage without further delay in an accelerated process of negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects and strict and effective international control.

The construction of a comprehensive framework of mutually reinforcing instruments for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons is an urgent priority that can no longer be postponed.

We believe that common threats can only be effectively addressed through enhanced international cooperation and strong and credible multilateral institutions that can respond to our collective security concerns.

Our principled approach in this forum should therefore be one that addresses common security concerns rather than the selective security concerns of certain countries, regions or security alliances.

National security concerns can be addressed as part of the negotiations on all issues on our agenda, and should not be used as a precondition for negotiations on any item.

South Africa believes that our national security is dependent on the collective security interests of the international community.

It remains our hope that the Conference on Disarmament, despite the many years that it has been at an impasse, can regain its position as a responsive multilateral institution. Continued inertia is not sustainable, and will increasingly affect the relevance and stature of the Conference on Disarmament as the world's sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

Since 2009 we have promoted the idea of a simplified approach to the programme of work as a way of breaking the impasse and allowing us to make headway on the major issues on our agenda. Some suggestions have been made that we could consider favourably. However, no formula that leaves out the main priority on our agenda, namely nuclear disarmament, would be acceptable.

We see no reason why any delegation would reject the establishment of a subsidiary body to deal with, to elaborate elements of or to develop proposals on nuclear disarmament. This is in line with the respective commitments made by States in various forums, and we are concerned about statements in this forum that seem to focus on only one of the

decisions set forth in the 2010 NPT Review Conference action plan, namely the decision related to a fissile material treaty.

It is important to recall that the 2010 NPT Review Conference also called for the establishment of a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament, as well as a subsidiary body on negative security assurances.

We hope that all States parties to the NPT will take all their commitments seriously and will guard against selective approaches to their solemn undertakings.

Negotiations are essential if we are to strengthen the international rule of law, which is key to promoting peace and security in a world where all countries, developing and developed, play by the same rules.

We stand ready to work with you, Mr. President, and interested colleagues in developing a proposal that could be agreeable to all.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of South Africa for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker on my list is the Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Gil Catalina (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain fully aligns itself with the statement made by Ireland on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. President, thank you for giving us the opportunity to exchange views on the programme of work, perhaps for the first time in a formal plenary meeting. My delegation welcomes you to this forum.

The drafters of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament conceived them in a Machiavellian manner as a kind of obstacle course that starts every year in January. An unusual obstacle course in which, under the rule of consensus, everyone must clear the hurdles at the same time. Every year we jump the first hurdle, adoption of the agenda, without any difficulty, but our collective poor level of fitness trips us up immediately and we are unable to clear the next hurdle, the adoption of the programme of work. Only once have we managed it, only once in 16 or 17 years, on 29 May 2009, when the Conference approved the now legendary decision CD/1864. The Conference took five months to clear the second hurdle. And what happened next? Well, perhaps exhausted by the effort, the delegates were unable to overcome the third hurdle, the implementation of the programme of work. Meaning that we had to line up again at the starting line in January 2010, and, since that time, we remain stuck on the hurdle of the programme of work.

With a programme of work, this forum would be in a position to fulfil its function: negotiating multilateral instruments on disarmament and non-proliferation. Without a programme of work, this forum is limited to talking repeatedly about agenda items, always saying the same things.

Maybe there are those who think that the Conference has achieved its aims solely by devoting itself to mere discussion: I do not believe this. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the Conference had substance which it lacks today, a range of issues were addressed concurrently. One of these issues, the focus of the moment, whether it was chemical, biological, conventional weapons or nuclear tests, was subject to negotiations which eventually resulted in the concluding of a treaty. The other issues were discussed. It is clear therefore that the Conference on Disarmament is able to discuss disarmament issues within its mandate. What the Conference on Disarmament should not do, despite unfortunately having done so for the past 16 or 17 years, is reduce itself to a talking shop. Its primary task is not to discuss, but to negotiate. For mere discussion, there are other forums of a multilateral nature, which are, more importantly, open to the participation of all United Nations Members.

If we look back once again in history, we will see that the logic for limiting the number of members of this forum is precisely to create a restricted but sufficiently representative environment conducive to negotiation. That is not to say that the Conference on Disarmament should not be expanded; Spain is wholly in favour of that.

Having said that, we believe that a programme of work should be used, first and foremost, to launch the negotiations concerning a fissile material cut-off treaty. Too much effort has been devoted to this goal, rivers of ink have flowed in this regard, and the expectations of the international community are far too high for this path to result in failure. We must remember: every negotiation is an open process, and the result of this process is called consensus. This forum, by means of inertia, frustrations and failure, has managed to transform consensus into the starting point and negotiation into a kind of line on the horizon. If the Conference continues down this path it runs a serious risk of losing its central role in the disarmament machinery altogether. It may not totally disappear, given the extraordinary ability of multilateral bodies to outlive their own original objectives. It is, however, possible that, by the turn of events, other bodies will end up assuming the Conference's leadership in negotiating disarmament and non-proliferation instruments. The steady deterioration in the debates in this room, in the matter of content, is a symptom of great concern.

Faced with this difficult state of affairs and this gloomy outlook, I would like to stress that we must not satisfy ourselves with mere discussion, nor resign ourselves to the lack of consensus. We congratulate the presidents over the course of this year who have attempted to devise a draft programme of work, in the knowledge that they were going to fail, since they have fulfilled the duty of any president, which consists of at least trying. Each one of these attempts has forced us to move from what someone called, rightly in my view, our comfort zone.

Mr. Wibowo (Indonesia): Mr. President, at the outset, allow me to commend you for taking up the issue of a programme of work — an issue of great importance to all of us — as our topic of discussion in today's plenary meeting.

The issue of a programme of work has been a long-sought-after cornerstone of our work. This is in line with rule 28 of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, which requires the Conference to establish a programme of work. Numerous attempts have indeed been made, and a number of drafts have been proposed, yet there is not a single hint of consensus in sight.

That leaves us with document CD/1864 of 2009 as our last mark on the chart. In this regard, I greatly appreciate the initiative taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran to seek the views of members on their preferred approach to the development of a programme of work and to finding a way of reaching common ground.

In this regard, I would like to share my views on the issue that we are discussing now. This is my understanding based on the consultations that I held during my presidency.

Creative options for confronting and overcoming the difficulties related to the formulation of a programme of work could be cultivated in several ways:

At the procedural level, the Conference should consider the possibility of simplifying its programme of work, first by moving to a basic timetable of activities and then by focusing on defining mandates for working groups individually rather than collectively. More importantly, the Conference needs to develop a new work culture. In my view, there is a puzzling lack of initiative on the part of members of the Conference to supplement the dutiful efforts of successive presidents to find a way out of the long-standing impasse.

Moving forward, I believe new approaches should be found. For example, the responsibility to devise a programme of work should no longer be entrusted solely to the President of the Conference. In addition to the presidents' consultations, it is time for members, through their respective regional groupings, to play an active part in shouldering their share of the work and responsibility involved in drafting the programme of work.

Having said this, we should encourage the regional groups to come up with their own draft programmes of work and, in a spirit of respect, try to find a middle ground among the drafts submitted by the various groups.

Secondly, there is also ample room for innovation in terms of our timetable. Including four core issues in a single programme of work or addressing all the four core issues in a single annual session of the Conference has proven difficult, as evidenced by the events of the last 16 years. Why then do we not start to consider agreeing to discuss each core issue consecutively, at a rate of one core issue per year? We could, for example, consider core issue A in 2014, core issue B in 2015, core issue C in 2016, and so on.

By changing our traditional approach, let us hope that the Conference on Disarmament can resolve the problems it faces.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Indonesia for his statement.

I note that there are still two more delegations that are asking for the floor. I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): Mr. President, at the outset, my delegation wishes to assure you of our full support in your endeavours to reach consensus on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work, and I think that these transparent considerations as well as this discussion today will help us reach our goal.

Our position on this subject is well known, but I will just briefly recap it for the benefit of my colleagues here as well as the Iranian presidency.

For my delegation, as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the G-21, nuclear disarmament remains the top priority as far as the work of the Conference on Disarmament is concerned. However, if it is not the right time for some delegations to negotiate on nuclear disarmament, we feel that the Conference on Disarmament can adopt a programme of work that provides for negotiations on negative security assurances. If we are to talk about the ripeness of any issue for negotiations, we feel that negative security assurances is one such issue.

We are enthusiastic about this issue, since we presume that none of the nuclear-weapon States would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States. And, in our view, these negotiations are going to be simple and straightforward, yet they will make an enormous contribution to global security.

We also heard today one particular viewpoint echoed in various statements. While we respect that viewpoint, we do not agree with it. That viewpoint equates progress in the Conference on Disarmament with negotiations on a so-called FMCT. Based on our past experience, we know that such an approach is not going to work.

Reference was made today to focusing on workable and consensual compromise. If this is our guiding principle, then we should jettison the approach that links negotiations on a so-called FMCT with the survival of the Conference on Disarmament and try to look for compromise solutions in a serious and meaningful manner.

Lastly, I would also like to take note of a reference made to the wording used in the United Nations General Assembly in relation to an FMCT. In this regard, I would like to draw the attention of my colleagues here to the wording used in the First Committee of the

United Nations General Assembly in resolutions dealing with nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances and outer space.

Mr. Najafi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, certainly, the delegation of Iran is glad to see that you are presiding over this august body. I wish you every success.

The position of the Islamic Republic of Iran with regard to the programme of work is well known. We have always maintained that we can support a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that clearly addresses the highest-priority issue for the Non-Aligned Movement.

The highest priority for the Non-Aligned Movement is nuclear disarmament. Therefore, in any programme of work we would like to see a negotiating mandate for a nuclear weapons convention with a fixed date for the total elimination of nuclear weapons under strict international verification.

As for the other core issues, we are ready to be constructive and to proceed with our work as long as the programme of work is balanced and gives equal weight to all those core issues.

In our view, the Conference on Disarmament, as the sole multilateral negotiating body, should bear its responsibility and work on the highest priority of the international community, which is nuclear disarmament. We are not supportive of a selective, unbalanced programme of work. However, we have indicated in all informal consultations and informal settings that we are ready to work constructively on a consensual programme of work that takes into account the concerns of all members.

We will continue such consultations, and we hope that all delegations can appreciate the complexity and the importance of the work of the Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement.

We have now heard a series of formal statements which reflect different views and positions on the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament. I have taken note of all the views expressed by all our distinguished colleagues.

I would now like to suspend this plenary meeting and start an informal, interactive exchange of views on the ways and means of elaborating and adopting a programme of work, as I indicated earlier.

As I have already mentioned, the purpose of this exercise, which is off the record, is to help me, as the President of the Conference on Disarmament, to identify possible elements for a draft programme of work.

I will therefore now close this formal meeting and reconvene the plenary in an informal meeting for the purpose of holding an interactive discussion on the programme of work.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.