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First Committee

10th meeting

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Official Records

Chair: Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia (Plurinational State of))

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Programme of work

The Chair: Before proceeding with the list of speakers for the general debate, I would like to inform the First Committee of how I intend to proceed in today's meeting. After the general debate, as per the established practice, we will hear statements by representatives of civil society, after which there will be an opportunity for delegations to speak in right of reply.

In keeping with the decision of the Committee at its 8th meeting, on 16 October (see A/C.1/74/PV.8), the Committee will then hear a formal presentation by the Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament and engage in an exchange with him in an informal setting. Time permitting, the Committee will then take up all outstanding organizational matters.

Agenda items 89 to 105 (continued)

General debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express our pleasure at seeing the representative of a friendly State chairing this important Committee.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/C.1/74/PV.3).

Despite the fact that most States Members of the United Nations have urged Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as a non-nuclear party, none of us believe it will do so, given that the United States, Britain, France, Canada, Germany and other countries are still protecting Israel's nuclear, military, biological and chemical programmes. They have even helped to develop and promote those weapons, in addition to supporting Israel in its refusal to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions regarding the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. That was evident in the failure of the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the result of the obstructionism of the United States, Britain and Canada, which encouraged Israel to continue challenging international opinion in its refusal to accede to the NPT and other conventions on the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction.

At the end of 2003, during my country's term on the Security Council, we submitted an initiative aimed at freeing the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. However, the United States delegation threatened to use the veto if we submitted a draft resolution on the matter. In that connection, my country renews its call to Member States to work towards freeing the Middle East region from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. We also call for putting pressure on Israel to join the NPT as a non-nuclear party and to subject all its nuclear facilities and activities to monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Israel is supported by the States that provided it with these

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weapons and ensured that it would be protected. In the 1980s the Israeli nuclear scientist Mordechai Vanunu revealed that Israel possessed and was developing nuclear weapons, as well as the fact that the Dimona nuclear reactor was in terrible condition. Those are not false claims. A recent issue of the American publication Foreign Policy revealed that 40 years ago the United States Administration concealed Israel's first nuclear test, on 22 September 1979 in the southern Atlantic Ocean, when the apartheid regime in South Africa was still in power.

My Government condemns in the strongest terms the crime of using chemical weapons, based on our commitment to freeing the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction and especially nuclear weapons. My country joined the Convention on Chemical Weapons in order to prove to the world that we stand against any use of chemical weapons. Syria has fulfilled its obligations pursuant to the Convention despite its difficult circumstances. All of that was verified by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Mission, in her report to the Security Council in June 2014. The Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled all its obligations by demolishing every site that produced chemical weapons. My country has continued to discuss issues related to the Syrian national declaration in the context of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), just like other States parties to the Convention.

My country has sent more than 180 letters to the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004), as well as its anti-terrorism committees. The first letter was sent four months before the first chemical attack on Khan Al-Assal, Aleppo, in March 2013. In those letters we confirmed our fears that State sponsors of terrorism would provide terrorist groups with chemical weapons and then claim that Syria used the weapons, events that have indeed taken place as we expected. The letters included precise information on the possession of toxic chemical weapons by terrorist organizations intending to use them against civilian and military individuals through intelligence arrangements with countries hostile to my country. That was in addition to providing Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front with toxic chemical substances via the borders between Turkey and Syria and with direct

support at the time from the Saudi organization Bandar bin Sultan. The letters explained the involvement of several Governments that had instructed these terrorist organizations to use chlorine and other toxic substances in areas that they controlled, with the purpose of taking photographs and filming videos in order to accuse the Syrian army of using them and thereby defame the Syrian Government. In addition, various States created a media platform for the armed terrorist groups known as White Helmets and awarded them an Oscar. They had the terrorist leaders flee Syria through the occupied Syrian Golan, with Israel's help, and moved them to the capitals of various Western countries.

We stress that Member States must take on their responsibility to stop the smuggling of weapons, ammunition and related material, as well as toxic chemical weapons. They must also stop smuggling militants and terrorists across the borders of Syria's neighbours. This is a warning that sooner or later the scourge of terrorism will strike back against the Governments that sponsor it. It will not do them any good to strip their terrorists of their nationality or to refuse to take them back and bring them to trial in their countries for their crimes.

The Chair: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See): I congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the Chair and assure you of our cooperation in pursuing the Committee's vital work to advance international peace and security.

Our discussion on general and complete disarmament comes in the wake of some significant events held during the recently concluded high-level week of the General Assembly, that is, the eleventh Conference to Facilitate the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the General Assembly high-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. With regard to the latter, I would like to once again refer to the words that Pope Francis addressed to the participants of a 2017 symposium in the Vatican when he said that

“the threat of the use [of nuclear weapons], as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned, for they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties in conflict but the entire human race.”

He called on the international community not to be beguiled by a false sense of security engendered by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, but rather, as members of our one human family, to base their security on the fundamental principles of universal fraternity and solidarity.

The Committee considers a wide spectrum of specific concepts and proposals for achieving the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Holy See urges their detailed examination with the objective of establishing, and as far as possible by consensus, actionable steps to reduce the prominence of nuclear weapons in global security through verifiable measures towards the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. My delegation urges Governments possessing nuclear weapons to reconsider any plans to modernize nuclear capabilities, whether for missiles, aircraft, submarines or warheads. Such developments risk expanding rather than reducing the role of nuclear weapons in global security. The Holy See also strongly urges all the Governments concerned to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, so that it may finally enter into force as a bulwark against the further development of nuclear weapons and as a necessary complement to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

The United Nations has no lack of forums where components of nuclear disarmament can be considered and negotiated. The Disarmament Commission has nuclear disarmament, transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space on its current agenda. It is well positioned to meet its goals. Indeed, transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space will strengthen stability by protecting the monitoring and verification assets that help make disarmament obligations function reliably.

At the same time, it is unfortunate that the Conference on Disarmament has for years been unable to agree on further steps in support of the elimination of nuclear weapons. Its members have the serious responsibility of working together to overcome that impasse. Mounting tensions in South Asia have increased the risks of armed conflict between nuclear-armed neighbours. Agreements to cease the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons would help reduce such risks. All the nuclear-weapon States are members of the Conference on Disarmament. With greater determination, the Conference could begin negotiations on steps that would move the world towards a security paradigm in which nuclear weapons

are no longer present. Furthermore, modifications of conventional forces related to nuclear weapons for the purposes of deterrence should also be brought under negotiation. Both nuclear and conventional forces fall under the purview of the NPT, whose article VI demands the achievement of nuclear disarmament within a context of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

In conclusion, I want to recognize the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, in which the Holy See participates as an observer. This important confidence-building effort, which has been under way for some time, provides input for verification mechanisms that support the objective of strengthening global security without reliance on nuclear weapons.

The Chair: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Bamyá (State of Palestine): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your election, as well as the members of the Bureau, and to assure you of our full cooperation.

The State of Palestine aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Indonesia, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and Tunisia, on behalf of the Group of Arab States (see A/C.1/74/PV.3).

All weapons of mass destruction must be prohibited, as their use is incompatible, at any time and under any circumstances, with the rules of international law, notably international humanitarian law, including the cardinal principles of humanity and distinction. There is no justification whatever for the continued exceptional status enjoyed by nuclear weapons compared with other weapons of mass destruction, especially as they are the most dangerous and deadly, as well as the most indiscriminate. Since there is no situation where the use of nuclear weapons can be compatible with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, their very existence is unlawful. The total elimination of nuclear weapons is a moral, legal and survival imperative to preserve us from the existential threat and catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences posed by such weapons.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is not about the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons alone but also about nuclear disarmament. It was supposed to be a starting point

towards nuclear disarmament, not a fait accompli that would justify the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was initiated to advance the goal of nuclear disarmament through the direct implementation of article VI of the NPT, making the two instruments complementary.

The State of Palestine is determined to contribute to the international disarmament process, which is critical to achieving regional and international peace and is one of the main goals behind the establishment of the United Nations itself. In that regard, the State of Palestine is proud to have participated in and actively contributed to the formulation of the landmark historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted in 2017. We are also proud to have acceded to the relevant instruments prohibiting other weapons of mass destruction. This year the State of Palestine also signed a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is crucial to international peace and security as well as regional security. It therefore concerns the international community as a whole, not just the States of the region. It is more urgent than ever and would constitute an important contribution to nuclear disarmament. Twenty-four years after the adoption of the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, and nine years after the adoption of the NPT's 2010 Action Plan, determined action is long overdue and must take place ahead of and during the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We want to emphasize the special responsibility of the sponsors of the 1995 resolution in advancing its implementation.

We stress the importance of the United Nations Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, to be held in November under the chairmanship of Jordan, in accordance with General Assembly decision 73/546, and we urge all parties to participate in good faith in that inclusive Conference, which is open to all States of the region, with its decisions to be based on consensus. The decision by one party to exclude itself or boycott the Conference can be attributed only to that country's long-standing policy of obstructing the establishment of such a zone, as the only party in the region that has unlawfully

acquired nuclear weapons and continues to refuse to join the NPT. No one can claim that it is too soon to be holding this Conference, which is finally coming now, before it is too late.

The State of Palestine is deeply concerned about the ever-increasing production of and international trade in weapons, including conventional weapons, many of which are used indiscriminately and disproportionately, and which is happening at the expense of other pressing objectives, including the eradication of poverty and the promotion of development. The State of Palestine has acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty and is looking forward to continuing to cooperate with all States parties to ensure compliance with it, including by upholding its prohibition on the transfer of conventional arms, ammunitions, munitions, as well as parts and components, if it is possible that they could be used in the commission of atrocity crimes such as crimes against humanity and war crimes, including attacks directed at civilian objects or civilians protected as such.

Palestine also underlines our shared and collective responsibility to preserve and protect the real and virtual spaces that belong to all humankind, including cyberspace and outer space. Ensuring that outer space is a safe and secure arena dedicated to research and development and our collective human advancement is essential to promoting international cooperation and safeguarding international peace and security.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support for the work of the Committee and its leadership and urge all States to take principled and determined action to fulfil its ultimate purpose of achieving a more peaceful and stable world.

The Chair: I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States.

Mrs. Elarja Flitti (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the chairmanship of the First Committee for this session. I want to reiterate our trust in your wisdom and diplomatic experience in guiding the work of the Committee to a successful conclusion, and to underline the support of the League of Arab States to you and the Bureau.

I align the League with the statement delivered by the representative of Tunisia on behalf of the Group of Arab States (see A/C.1/74/PV.3).

The First Committee is the most effective multilateral forum for achieving the objectives, principles and commitments that the international community has agreed to regarding full and complete disarmament. It also contributes to a consensus on promoting security both regionally and internationally. In that context, the League of Arab States as a regional organization has always been supportive of the principles and values of the United Nations regarding the maintenance of international peace, security and stability, which can never be achieved without the total elimination of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, full control over traditional weapons and the provision of the enormous human and financial resources that will thereby be saved to accelerate countries' development processes.

Based on its members' desire and commitment to ensuring international and regional peace and security, the League of Arab States has always been effective in demonstrating its support for full disarmament, including of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, not only by its continued promotion of the non-proliferation regime through its accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), but also through its tireless efforts to establish a zone in the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, like other such regional zones. We have engaged continually and actively in all regional and international forums calling for the establishment of such a zone, including various international conventions and treaties. We have also participated positively, effectively and sustainably in all the relevant disarmament conferences.

Regrettably, there are certain parties in the region that are not committed to implementing the United Nations resolutions and decisions aimed at establishing such a zone. There are also other nuclear States that have refused to adopt specific time frames for implementing their international commitments regarding the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. In that context, we continue to be concerned about the ongoing failure to achieve any tangible progress in nuclear disarmament and the implementation of commitments to that end, which intensifies our fears that we will not be able to ensure the universality of the NPT. Now more than ever we need international forums involved in disarmament to redouble their efforts to revive their credibility, the cornerstone of the international security and non-proliferation system, especially after the failure

of the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to produce an outcome document after three States parties to the Treaty violated the principle of consensus.

The members of the League of Arab States have endorsed General Assembly decision 73/546, on convening a United Nations conference on establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. That represents a substantial contribution on our part to ensuring the success of the 2020 Review Conference, which will focus on implementing the 1995 resolution on the Middle East and the outcomes of the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences regarding the Middle East.

The success of the Review Conference is linked to Member States' success in meeting their regional and international obligations. Regrettably, however, Israel always repudiates those obligations and rejects the possibility of accession to the NPT and adherence to the International Atomic Energy Agency comprehensive safeguards agreements with respect to its nuclear facilities. The League of Arab States therefore encourages all the countries that have been invited to attend the first United Nations Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction to prioritize international and regional interests over narrow individual policies. We urge the five nuclear States, particularly the three depositary States, to play the role expected of them. We also ask Israel to reconsider its decision not to participate in the Conference, whose work will be based on consensus among the States of the region, in line with the Disarmament Commission's 1999 guidelines.

Through its ministerial committees on disarmament and regional security, as well as its member States' national focal points on traditional arms control, the League of Arab States has always stressed the promotion of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, without prejudice to its members' legitimate right to acquire necessary traditional arms. We also call for promoting international cooperation on cybersecurity, which is increasingly important in realizing our ultimate goal of combating terrorism and violent extremism in situations where control has been lost over the flow of traditional weapons and they have fallen into the hands of terrorist groups.

We believe that outer space is part of the common heritage of humankind, not of certain individual States. The maintenance of its safety and availability for peaceful use will be the responsibility of the entire international community in every generation. We totally reject any call or move to start an arms race or settle disputes in outer space. The international community should promote all the relevant conventions related to positive efforts to enhance the peaceful uses of outer space, organize those activities and adopt an international legally binding instrument prohibiting armaments in outer space, as well as preventing an arms race and the means that it could bring to attack objects in outer space, including satellites and space components. In that context, the League of Arab States has welcomed and encouraged through its member States all the thematic discussions of the Group of Governmental Experts on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space, with regard to formulating objective elements for a binding instrument with the main aim of banning an arms race in outer space, in line with General Assembly resolution 72/250.

The Chair: I now give the floor to the observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Mardini (International Committee of the Red Cross): I will read a shortened version of the statement of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The full text will be available on both PaperSmart and the ICRC website.

Against a backdrop of untold suffering in armed conflicts, notably in parts of the Middle East and Africa, the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions has been a forceful reminder that even wars have limits. It also reminds us that international humanitarian law strikes a careful balance between military necessity and humanitarian imperatives. The recognition that military needs can never justify using inhumane or indiscriminate weapons has also driven arms control and disarmament.

Next year will mark a more sombre anniversary — 75 years since nuclear weapons were first used, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those horrific events have left an indelible mark on humankind's conscience. The International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent has testified to the devastation of these cities and the unimaginable scale of human suffering caused by the atomic bombs, including the

long-term effects of radiation exposure on tens of thousands of survivors. Our first-hand knowledge of these catastrophic humanitarian consequences, our inability to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to the victims of a nuclear attack and the general incompatibility of nuclear weapons with international humanitarian law have underpinned our calls since 1945 to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons provides hope for a future without nuclear weapons. Its comprehensive prohibition is a long-awaited and essential step towards implementing article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). By signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, States are sending a clear signal that any use, threat of use or possession of such weapons is unacceptable in humanitarian, moral and legal terms. That signal is needed more than ever in a world in which the risk of the use of nuclear weapons is growing. The erosion of the nuclear disarmament and arms-control framework signals a deeply worrying trend towards a new nuclear arms race.

The 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will be a critical opportunity for implementing long-standing risk-reduction commitments and halting and reversing the new nuclear arms race. The NPT was adopted in response to the devastation that would be visited on all humankind by nuclear war. The ICRC urges all NPT States parties, irrespective of their views on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, to find common ground in the humanitarian rationale that motivated the development of the NPT in the first place.

Science and technology developments, whether in computing, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics or chemistry, biology, and materials technology, may be inevitable, but their weaponization is not. It is a choice that must be taken based on humanitarian, legal, military and ethical considerations. It must be based on realistic assessments of the technologies and their actual or foreseeable humanitarian impact in armed conflict. In recent years, sophisticated cyberattacks have succeeded in disrupting the provision of services essential to the civilian population such as health care, electricity and water-supply systems. In our increasingly digitalized world, such attacks are reportedly becoming more frequent and their effects risk becoming more severe.

The ICRC is aware that the unique characteristics of cyberspace raise questions about the interpretation and application of international humanitarian law rules. The ICRC will soon publish a position paper on international humanitarian law and cyber operations during armed conflict for submission to the Open-ended Working Group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security and the Group of Governmental Experts on advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security. We welcome those bodies' important work and urge them to affirm that international humanitarian law imposes limits on the use of cyber operations during armed conflicts. Doing so does not imply that new rules might not be needed, but if new rules are developed, they should build on and strengthen existing law.

The ICRC's concern about autonomous weapon systems, including those that incorporate AI and machine learning, is based on the issue of the loss of human control over the use of force, which would present serious risks for protected persons in armed conflict — both civilians and combatants no longer fighting — as well as risks of violations of international humanitarian law, while raising fundamental ethical concerns about leaving life-and-death decisions to sensors and software. In view of the specific characteristics of autonomous weapon systems, which select and attack targets without human intervention, and the unique legal and ethical issues they raise, the ICRC continues to call on States that are members of the Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems to set limits on autonomy in weapon systems. We call on States to determine the type and degree of human control needed to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and ethical acceptability.

With the increasing urbanization of warfare, the ICRC is alarmed by the devastating direct and indirect harm caused to civilians by the use of explosive weapons with a wide-impact area in populated areas. On 18 September, the President of the ICRC and the Secretary-General of the United Nations jointly appealed to States and all parties to armed conflicts to avoid the use of such weapons in populated areas, owing to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects. They urged States to adopt policies and practices to enhance the protection of civilians and facilitate compliance with international humanitarian law in urban warfare.

The ICRC welcomes all efforts to that end, notably the Vienna Conference on Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare, recently hosted by Austria, where a large number of States expressed firm support for formulating a political declaration to address the harm done to civilians by explosive weapons in populated areas. A political declaration can be a powerful tool for creating tangible progress, provided it contains strong and unequivocal commitments to changing behaviour and stopping the tide of civilian deaths and suffering.

Finally, the ICRC urges States to seize the opportunity of the forthcoming Review Conferences of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention next month and the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2020, presided over respectively by Norway and Switzerland, to join those crucial international humanitarian law treaties. Fulfilling their promise of a world free of anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions will save lives, limbs and livelihoods.

The Chair: We have heard from the last speaker on the list for the general debate. The Committee will now listen to statements by the representatives of non-governmental organizations. I request that all speakers kindly keep their statements short, and no longer than three minutes.

In keeping with the Committee's established practice, I will now suspend the meeting to enable us to continue in an informal setting.

The meeting was suspended at 3.40 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

The Chair: I shall now call on delegations that have requested to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I would like to remind all delegations that the first intervention is limited to 10 minutes and the second to five minutes.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am somewhat behind in asking for this right to reply, since I want to respond to the statement last week by the United States representative (see A/C.1/74/PV.3) in which he suggested that the Russian delegation should exercise its influence on the Syrian authorities to ensure that they refrain from the use of chemical weapons. I would like to remind our American colleagues that it was the Russian Federation that initiated Syria's chemical demilitarization, in 2013. It was we who were able to persuade the Syrian Government to join the Chemical Weapons Convention. Furthermore,

our country actively participated in the international operations to destroy Syria's chemical-weapon arsenal and thereby made a serious and significant contribution to resolving that complex issue. I would also like to remind them of the difficult conditions in which the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons took place, that is, the active warfare that was going on in most of Syria. In that regard, thanks specifically to Russia's assistance, Syria was able to rid itself of one of the most dangerous kinds of massively destructive weapons. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was able to confirm that fact, so important to international and regional organizations.

We were therefore astonished by the statement by the United States representative, who is convinced that the Syrian authorities are using chemical weapons. But that conviction is close to a blind belief that in the correctness of its own conclusions and the impartiality and objectivity of the documents and reports of the bodies involved in investigating the chemical incidents in Syria. That blind belief is preventing the United States from objectively analysing the information in those reports and from considering other, alternative opinions and assessments of the work of the relevant international bodies and the information they gathered.

I would like to note separately that the Russian Federation has frequently pointed out how essential it is to maintain the chain of custody in the collection of evidence in cases of the use of chemical weapons, as stipulated in the Chemical Weapons Convention. We have also frequently pointed out that the chain of custody has been regularly violated in the preparation of reports on the basis of which far-reaching conclusions have been drawn regarding the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian authorities. Part of the work on individual instances of uses of harmful chemical substances in Syria is now based on the contradictory, dubious and sometimes simply absurd evidence that has been adduced in the context of the work of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team.

To save time, I will not speak to the legitimacy of that body, which was created on the insistence of the United States and its allies. I will simply note that we have major doubts about the objectivity and impartiality of the Investigation and Identification Team, which is beginning its activities on a basis of very questionable foundations. In addition, the unshakeable belief of the United States in the culpability of the Syrian authorities is preventing our American colleagues from accepting

the evidence being presented by Russia, Syria and independent experts, that is, information on terrorist organizations based in Syria that have acquired access to technology, materials and components used to create chemical weapons. Our information on acts of provocation planned by terrorists using dangerous chemicals or chemical weapons continues to be ignored.

I want to emphasize that like the entire international community, we consider the use of chemical weapons a hugely serious violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and believe that the perpetrators of such barbaric acts should be accountable for them. However, we ask the United States to approach these issues objectively, impartially and, most importantly, accurately. After all, conducting investigations and drawing any conclusions based on their results can have serious consequences for the innocent. Moreover, the creation within the framework of the OPCW of the Investigation and Identification Team and the decisions taken to establish it are in contravention of the authority of the Security Council. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United States should understand the magnitude of the responsibility involved in such far-reaching decisions, and where chemical incidents are being investigated should require an objective approach and assurances that all the obligations of the Chemical Weapons Convention are being met.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor and I will be brief. The reality is that Syria has yet to give a full accounting of the destruction of its chemical-weapon stockpiles. I will continue to strongly urge my Russian colleague to try harder to persuade Syria to be forthcoming in terms of numbers in that regard. Syria has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people. That is a fact. There is no longer any reason to debate that. Finally, I would like to point out that over the past year, it has become clear that Syria is not the only State that has used chemical weapons in violation of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The United States representative surprises us every time with the way he speaks about his beliefs and with his empty accusations against Syria. The only facts that anyone anywhere in the world knows for sure are that the United States has used nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, in addition to having used many internationally prohibited weapons, such as white phosphorus, which it has used against civilians

in my country. That is the simple truth that is known to everyone.

The problem of the use of chemical substances as a weapon on Syrian territories is a real one, and we condemn it. But the question is how the terrorists acquired those chemical weapons and who trained them to use chemical weapons. As we have said before, we have provided the Security Council — of which the United States is a permanent member — with information about the presence of United States experts on Syrian territory and in neighbouring countries who are training terrorists on how to use and mix chemical weapons.

It seems ironic that the United States has opted to pursue a so-called gender balance. In September 2016, the United States sent two female experts in chemical substances to Syria. They left our territory and entered a neighbouring country on 6 September. While on Syrian territory, they trained and assisted Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorists and terrorists of an affiliated group with the mixing and use of chemical substances. Those are facts, and we have expressed our readiness to provide the relevant names and photographs. Successive United States Administrations have supervised terrorists while transferring toxic chemical substances to them, whether by sending them directly to Syrian territory or from one area controlled by terrorists to another. When terrorists acquired large quantities of those weapons, such as when at some point they obtained 50 rockets with chemical warheads, the United States Administration took part in the distribution and dispatch of those weapons, deciding which terrorist group would receive five, seven or 15 rockets, and so on. That is one of the roles that the United States Administration has played.

In addition, the United States Administration has supervised filming operations while fabricating chemical incidents with a view to blaming the Syrian Arab Republic and defaming the Syrian Government, as it did in 2018. The technical report of Ian Henderson, a staff member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, gave details of the alleged incident in Douma in Syria in April 2018, revealing clear evidence of that the attacks were fabricated by the United States, Britain and France in order to enable them to launch a vicious aggression against my country. Those are facts, unlike what the United States representatives have claimed.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I will be brief. This is just another day in the First Committee, with more lies from the representative of the Syrian regime. The terrorists who have used chemical weapons in Syria are those who are in power in Damascus, and they will eventually be held to account. I would therefore encourage Syria's enablers and supporters to end their support for that regime. If they do not, history will judge them accordingly. Lastly, the Syrian representative accused the United States of defaming the Government in Syria. We do not need to defame the Syrian regime. The regime has done a better job of that than we could ever do.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am obliged to take the floor again to say that the Russian Federation conducts its foreign policy based on the principles of cooperation, collaboration with partner countries on an equal footing and respect for the interests of those countries, and not on the principle of pressuring others, as is typical of United States foreign policy.

If the United States wants, I can talk to the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic right here in this room and call on them to cooperate closely with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its Technical Secretariat and with the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in order to banish all concerns both about the Syrian chemical dossier and all of the claims that have been made in connection with the chemical incidents in Syria over the past few years. But I am not going to do that, for one simple reason. Since joining the OPCW, Syria has consistently demonstrated its willingness to cooperate honestly, openly and fully with it in order to address all existing or emerging issues related to the Syrian chemical dossier. My call would therefore add no value.

The Syrian authorities are doing everything possible to confirm that Syria is an honest and reliable party to the CWC. The only obstacle to resolving the issues in the Syrian chemical dossier is the policy that we have been seeing for the past few years of the United States' manipulation of the OPCW leadership, of which the chemical attack in Douma is a clear example. The Russian Federation provided indisputable and reliable evidence about the fact that the incident had been staged. However, the OPCW Technical Secretariat, under the direction of the United States, has refused to give objective and impartial consideration to the

information we presented regarding the indisputable evidence showing that the incident was staged. In our view, that is one of the main reasons why we have now been dealing with the Syrian chemical dossier in The Hague and here for many years.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): I hesitated to get into this debate, but since the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic brought up my country, I feel obliged to reply. I will be brief, since I said pretty much everything that needed to be said the last time I had the opportunity to express myself on this subject.

Briefly, we all know that one country, Syria, is being supported by another country that is a permanent member of the Security Council. These two countries have been seeking to shut down the Syrian dossier and close the file on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. They have not succeeded, so they are attempting to invent a narrative and rewrite history. As my colleague from the United States said, it is clear that history will judge the perpetrators of these crimes severely, but history will also judge those who have covered up those crimes, whether operationally or politically, within the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the Security Council and all the other forums that will deal with this issue.

Regarding the impartiality of the investigations that have been conducted by the various organizations, particularly the OPCW and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), those two investigative mechanisms based the preparation and writing of their reports on an extremely rigorous methodology with the highest possible technical standards. No one but a handful of countries has questioned the impartiality that is the foundation of their work, and no one has questioned the guaranteed professionalism of their investigations. What happened was that at the end of 2017, when the JIM released a report (S/2017/904, annex) acknowledging the responsibility of the Syrian regime for two attacks in Syria, a member of the Security Council, not coincidentally, refused to renew the mandate of this Mechanism for attributing responsibility. That is where we are. It was not only the United States that supported the implementation of an OPCW accountability mechanism. My country did too. A large number of countries — indeed, a majority of the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention — wanted the OPCW to be granted the

necessary and essential capabilities for determining responsibility for chemical attacks.

When we talk about non-compliance with our obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, what do we mean? Because I believe we must look at the realities behind the words. We are talking about hundreds who have endured excruciating and unbearable suffering thanks to the use of nerve gas and chlorine on a huge scale, which has not only killed many people — civilians, women and children — but has also resulted in lifelong consequences for people who because of Syria will forever have to bear the traces of the use of this intolerable weapon, which had remained taboo for the international community until now.

That is where we are today. My country has called for the creation of a partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and I believe that both our human consciences and that of the international community understand why that is the direction we must take. That will take time, but however long it takes, it is clear that sooner or later the perpetrators of these crimes will be brought before the relevant authorities, because such acts constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): With regard to the allegations referred to by the representative of the ruling regime in the United States, we want to say that Syria has implemented all of the obligations it assumed when it acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The other issues related to the Syrian declaration are technical ones that are discussed in The Hague.

The representative of the ruling regime in the United States is familiar with the United States Government's policies of deception, lies and fabrications. I want him to know that we have not forgotten and will not forget the lie surrounding weapons of mass destruction that led to the invasion of Iraq, resulting in the devastation of our region and the spread of terrorist organizations that were in fact sponsored by the United States. The Committee may remember the statements made by certain United States officials on the United States' involvement in supporting terrorists and even in creating terrorist organizations. It is truly regrettable that a country such as the United States uses terrorist groups to implement its foreign policy plans against various countries. The crimes committed by many United States Administrations are so numerous that we

cannot even list all of them. We would need light years, not ordinary years, to hold them accountable for the crimes they have committed in killing innocent people all over the world. Anyone who can access the Internet can search for the lies and allegations that United States Administrations have used to launch one aggression after the other worldwide. They are facts that have been documented more by individual United States citizens than by any other Western countries' nationals.

With regard to the statement by the representative of the French regime, his Government should stop sending French chemical experts — and terrorists too, of course — to assist terrorists in Syria. The regime should investigate its former Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius for his involvement in the 2013 chemical-weapon incident in eastern Ghouta.

As for the disreputable mechanism that has now ceased to exist, it was functioning under the control of the United States, France and Britain. It ended because it breached its functions and even the principles established by the mechanism itself. It was nothing more than a political tool used by those States.

The Chair: In accordance with the Committee's decision, we will now hear a briefing by His Excellency Ambassador Knut Langeland of Norway, Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. I would like to welcome Ambassador Langeland to our meeting. Following his statement, the Committee will change to an informal mode to afford delegations the opportunity to ask questions.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Langeland.

Mr. Langeland (Norway) Chair, the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament: Three years ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/67, on nuclear disarmament verification, which affirmed that nuclear disarmament verification, while not an end in itself, remains important to achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. The resolution called for enhanced cooperation among States in order to advance nuclear disarmament verification. It also requested that the Secretary-General seek the views of Member States on nuclear disarmament verification. Finally, it requested that the Secretary-General establish a group of governmental experts (GGE) of up to 25 participants, on a basis of equitable geographic distribution, to meet in Geneva in 2018 and 2019 for a total of three five-day

sessions. Under the resolution, the GGE's mandate was to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. More precisely, it instructed the Group to consider the general role of nuclear disarmament verification in achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. It was also asked to make use of the report of the Secretary-General on Member States' views on nuclear disarmament verification (A/72/304), which became available in the fall of 2017. At the end of 2017, the Secretary-General selected 25 governmental experts. The first session of the GGE was held in May 2018, the second in November of that year, and the GGE concluded its work in April 2019.

Two informal workshops were organized at Wilton Park, in England, the first in preparation for the GGE's first session and the second a year later, in preparation for the Group's final session. The First Committee was briefed on the work of the GGE last year (see A/C.1/73/PV.11), and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has also been informed. The Group's first session enabled us to have more general exchanges on nuclear disarmament verification. The discussions were rich. A number of participants underlined the benefits of advancing nuclear disarmament verification, while others reminded the Group of the risks posed by engaging non-nuclear-weapon States on nuclear disarmament verification. Some affirmed that it was possible to make use of techniques and methodologies to overcome those challenges. The Group also benefited from a number of presentations on relevant past experiences. As the Committee will see, the final report (A/74/90) includes a summary, drafted under my own responsibility, of the presentation in relation to past experience in verification.

The first session also devoted considerable time to principles. The point of departure was the 16 generic principles for verification identified by the Disarmament Commission in 1988 (A/51/182/Rev.1). The GGE went through the principles in order to weigh their relevance to nuclear disarmament verification in the light of the experience gained over the last 30 years. That was pursued in depth at the GGE's second and third sessions. The discussion also included a conceptual understanding of nuclear disarmament verification.

At the second session, in November 2018, we focused on three aspects of nuclear disarmament verification. We asked ourselves what might constitute effective and adequate verification, how we should go about it, to what extent we can draw lessons from past experiences

and who would carry out verification, including possible roles and functions for carrying out and supporting the various phases of nuclear disarmament verification. A number of working papers were submitted on those three aspects in preparation for the second session. It is also worth noting that several of them were joint papers involving a number of members from different regions. The working papers shaped our discussion at the November session, where we managed to further refine our conceptual understanding of what might constitute effective nuclear disarmament verification, as well as guidelines.

However, it was too early to talk about consensus. We considered the possibility of drawing particular lessons from past experiences. We took an in-depth look at what sort of institutional support function might be required for nuclear disarmament verification and what capacities would be needed. A number of Group members underlined the issue of capacity-building in that context. Another topic that led to substantial exchanges was how we could better prepare ourselves for any future treaties. Some members suggested that the experience of the Group of Scientific Experts in the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty process was worth exploring.

To a large extent, the third session was devoted to the preparation of the report to the General Assembly. It was a hectic week, with two long night meetings. I am grateful for the flexibility demonstrated by the GGE members, who were willing to skip dinner and coffee breaks and spend long evenings in the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Their flexibility paid off. We eventually managed to agree on the report, which is divided into three main sections. The first reflects the range of views expressed in the GGE. The second moves onto possible points of convergence and also includes suggested principles. Then we have conclusions and, lastly, recommendations, and I would like to share some of those outcomes with everyone. The GGE was able to identify possible guidelines for nuclear disarmament verification and suggested the following principles, which are suggestions rather than set in stone.

First, nuclear disarmament verification should conform to international law and the principles outlined in the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (A/S-10/2) and the Disarmament Commission's 1988 verification principles. Secondly, nuclear disarmament verification measures should be decided by the parties to the specific

treaties, and all the parties to such treaties should have an equal right to establish and take part in verification activities. Thirdly, nuclear disarmament verification must conform to the applicable international legal non-proliferation obligations, national safety and security requirements and the need to protect otherwise sensitive information. Fourthly, nuclear disarmament verification must be effective in ensuring compliance by the parties with obligations under the relevant treaty while also being mindful of the need for efficiency in the application of financial, human and other resources. Additionally, nuclear disarmament verification provisions in the context of a specific treaty should be clear as to the obligations of the parties concerned. Next, a future nuclear disarmament verification regime must be non-discriminatory to countries party to the treaty. Lastly, verification arrangements satisfactory to all the parties involved should correspond to the purposes, scope and nature of the agreements reached on nuclear disarmament.

I will now read out our conclusions.

“Advancing nuclear disarmament is an ongoing undertaking, and there is a need for the continued international examination of the issue in all its aspects, including verification.

“Verification is essential in the process of nuclear disarmament and to achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

“The role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament will be determined on a case-by-case basis in the context of the negotiations of legally binding agreements in the area of nuclear disarmament.

“A credible verification regime in which all States have confidence will be essential for maintaining a world without nuclear weapons.

“Confidence-building measures may complement nuclear disarmament verification arrangements between the implementing parties of a specific treaty.” (A/74/90, p.14)

Finally, the Group recommended that States Members of the United Nations, as well as relevant parts of the international disarmament machinery, in accordance with their respective mandates, consider the report and further work related to the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament, taking the report into account. It was not obvious that the

Group of Governmental Experts would be able to agree on a report. We managed to do so because we were all ready to make the necessary compromises. The GGE recognized that work on nuclear disarmament verification is an ongoing process, and this week a draft resolution on possible follow-up has been submitted.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

I would also like to share some personal observations. First, I appreciate the constructive participation of the members of the Group of Governmental Experts. We operated on a first-name basis in a good and collegial atmosphere. Towards the end of our work, we had an extensive discussion of the gender dimension. Some wanted it reflected in the report while others did not agree. In the end, I promised to raise the matter in my oral presentation to the First Committee. It is a fact that only three countries — Argentina, Indonesia and Mexico — had designated female experts to the Group. Speaking personally, I hope that the gender composition of a future Group of Governmental Experts on nuclear disarmament verification will be more balanced. I also want to express my deep appreciation for the invaluable assistance of Silvia Mercogliano, from the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs in Geneva, consultants Anette Schaper and Wilfred Wan, from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, and Jørn Osmundsen, who coordinated the Norwegian support team and succeeds me as Norway's Special Envoy for Disarmament Affairs.

The Acting Chair: I now give the floor to delegations wishing to make statements or comments on the briefing we have just heard.

Ms. Wood (Australia): I think that the fact that the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament was able to reach a consensus on such an important topic shows us that cooperative work really does have value for verification and that we still have a lot to do. I would also like to thank the Chair for his personal reflections on the importance of diversity and inclusion in any future process. I was interested in his comments about capacity-building, and, looking ahead, I am also interested in the Chair's views on how we can advance capacity-building in a way that engages a wider range of countries. Could a future Group of Governmental Experts offer opportunities to promote capacity-building? And there is a lot of discussion

about disarmament education. I wonder how nuclear disarmament verification could feed into the debate by raising awareness on the importance and complexity of verification.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have two questions for the Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. I would first like to thank him for his excellent briefing on the Group's work, and on its report (A/74/90) and the recommendations it contains.

My first question is about the fact that in discussing this initiative, the Russian Federation several times expressed concern about the possibility that within its framework sensitive information might be transmitted to non-nuclear-weapon States or that there could be a leak of such information, which would be in contravention of articles I and II of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It would be interesting to hear the Chair's comments on whether that question was discussed in the Group, and if so, what recommendations or measures it came up with that might be able to prevent such scenarios. That is my first question.

My second question — and I apologize for taking so long — concerns one of the report's key principles on nuclear verification. I will read it in English.

(*spoke in English*)

“Nuclear disarmament verification measures should be decided by the parties to specific treaties” (A/74/90, para. 38).

(*spoke in Russian*)

In addition, the report states in its conclusions that

(*spoke in English*)

“[t]he role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament will be determined on a case-by-case basis in the context of the negotiations of legally binding agreements”. (*ibid.*, para. 39)

(*spoke in Russian*)

The draft resolution proposed by our Norwegian colleagues in support of the work of the Group of Governmental Experts recognizes that

(*spoke in English*)

verification is not an aim in and of itself.

(spoke in Russian)

Taking all of this into account, that raises the probably fair question as to what precisely future GGEs will do, practically speaking, given the fact that at present there are no new agreements on nuclear disarmament and that no negotiations on concluding such agreements are being held.

The Chair returned to the Chair.

Perhaps the Chair, with his experience and the information he has on the discussions that took place, can give us his opinion about what he thinks a new group of governmental experts could do on a practical level.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): I would first and foremost like to thank Ambassador Langeland for his briefing and, more importantly, his leadership of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. We very much appreciated his guidance throughout the process, which resulted in a substantive and consensus report (A/74/90). An expert from the Netherlands participated in the GGE, and we play an active role in various other initiatives on nuclear disarmament verification. In that context, we were honoured to host a meeting of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification in the Netherlands this year. Verification is a vital component of any nuclear disarmament process and the GGE report is an important part of it. We encourage all delegations to familiarize themselves with it, particularly its conclusions and recommendations, which the Chair of the GGE highlighted earlier, as well as the points of convergence it identifies. They all represent an important stepping stone to future work.

I would also like to take this opportunity to ask the Chair of the Group two questions about further steps towards achieving nuclear disarmament verification. First, what in his view are the key areas on which the next GGE could focus, building on the work that has already been done? And secondly, what technical challenges could the next GGE address?

Mr. Hassan (Egypt): I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Langeland for his very informative briefing and to congratulate him and the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament on reaching a consensus on their important report (A/74/90).

While we fully understand that it was quite difficult to reach that consensus, we nonetheless have some concerns about the possibility that the consensus came at a price, which is the level of commitment in it to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to the objective of nuclear disarmament itself. I would like to convey why we think that that is the case. Needless to say, we fully acknowledge that the intentions were good, but there may have been some unintended consequences in reaching the consensus reflected in the report. We have carefully examined the report, and we would like to highlight some observations about its content.

Except for an indirect and mostly insignificant passing footnote that refers ambiguously to the outcomes of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the report makes no reference whatever to the NPT and its article VI. Instead, in several paragraphs — for example, paragraphs 20 and 28 — the report stresses that new treaties are needed for verifiable nuclear disarmament to advance. In that regard, we would like to point out that article VI refers to effective measures on nuclear disarmament rather than the conclusion of further treaties. Moreover, the report contains an unnecessary paragraph, paragraph 6, which states that there were different views on “whether the current security environment is or is not conducive to progress in nuclear disarmament”. We believe that paragraph was uncalled for, and it could be argued that it goes beyond the mandate of the GGE, which was tasked with discussing nuclear disarmament verification, not making judgments as to whether or not the security conditions are conducive to nuclear disarmament.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the issue of the need for a group of technical or scientific experts and on issues like capacity-building undermines the wealth of knowledge and expertise available thanks to the decades of safeguards and verification undertakings under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and other arrangements and bilateral or unilateral experiences. The comparison with the 20 years of the work of the Group of Scientific Experts on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty misses the key difference between verifying that fissile material is not being diverted to weaponization activities and verifying the occurrence of a nuclear-test explosion, about which the international community knew very little in the 1970s when the Group of Scientific Experts was established.

We should cite the historic experiences of the brave decision taken by South Africa, of former republics of the Soviet Union and even of the unilateral and bilateral reductions under the NPT and the START Treaty. They show that verifiable nuclear disarmament can be conducted and achieved without the need for further new treaties. We should remind ourselves of the role of the IAEA safeguards system and of the fact that article III.B.1 of the IAEA Statute explicitly tasks the Agency with furthering the establishment of safeguarded worldwide disarmament. We can also cite the example of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which set a requirement for adhering to the Treaty that relies on the IAEA comprehensive safeguards agreements as a minimum requirement. We should also cite the 2018 report of the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group (A/73/159), which included an option for the removal of fissile material from weaponization programmes that could be placed under the Agency's safeguards. That is one option contained in a report endorsed by the General Assembly, and it is worthy of consideration.

We think that the GGE's report may lead to an implicit assessment that nuclear disarmament is not progressing or cannot move forward owing to a lack of technical expertise or multilateral agreements on verification. That in itself could create a new obstacle to moving forward on nuclear disarmament. We strongly believe that the impediments to nuclear disarmament are more political than technical.

I want to assure Ambassador Langeland that we fully appreciate the effort put forward in the report. We just have some reservations about it. We believe that its content could have been better balanced. We therefore intend to submit our comments in writing to the Secretary-General, and we fully support efforts aimed at strengthening the capabilities and knowledge of the international community on the technical aspects of verifiable nuclear disarmament. We just believe that the work should focus on providing guidance on the possible pace at which the dismantling of nuclear warheads can take place once a particular State takes a political decision, and on the time frame that is needed for the fissile material used in those warheads or for other weaponization purposes to be placed under reliable safeguards.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): I am very grateful to Ambassador Langeland for his extremely useful briefing and expert chairing of the process. I believe

that the report of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament (A/74/90) and, more important, the discussion, represents a really excellent contribution to the literature and has really moved us forward, although of course there is still more to be done.

Verification is clearly both a major political and technical challenge to our work. But it is absolutely crucial if we are going to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. Whether by treaties or unilateral or bilateral measures, verification of the absence of nuclear weapons is essential. While it is certainly true that the challenge will vary from instrument to instrument and process to process and should therefore be done on a case-by-case basis, it is quite right that we explore principles and techniques that negotiators can draw on when they are negotiating those processes. It is also true to say that this has to be a transparent and inclusive process, because non-nuclear and nuclear-weapon States alike have to be confident in the irreversibility and verifiability of those processes when they come. I think that it is therefore very important that we have processes that involve a wide range of participants.

There are, of course, many other processes happening on verification. The United Kingdom is proud to have been part of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), as well as the Quad Nuclear Verification Partnership with Norway, Sweden and the United States, including our Operation Letterpress verification exercise. The French and German nuclear disarmament verification exercises are also an important contribution. It is therefore right and proper that there be a United Nations process that brings together a wider group of participants and brings that experience into the United Nations. But one of the questions that I have for the Chair of the GGE, in looking forward to new processes, and in hope that the draft resolution on the follow-up processes will be adopted with strong support, is how a future United Nations process can bring in the experience from external processes such as IPNDV, as well as the Quad Partnership and its Operation Letterpress. I also support what the representative of Australia said about capacity-building, because that too is an important area for further work.

The Chair: In keeping with the established practice of the Committee, I will now suspend the meeting to afford delegations an opportunity to continue our informal interactive discussion.

The meeting was suspended at 5.40 p.m. and resumed at 5.50 p.m.

The Chair: We have exhausted the time available for today's meeting. The next meeting of the First

Committee will be held on Monday, 21 October at 10 a.m. in this conference room, when we will continue our consideration of organizational matters.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.