



General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

253rd meeting

Tuesday, 1 April 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Maiolini (Italy)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

vindicate the cause of disarmament as a fundamental task of the work of the United Nations.

General debate

The Chairman: I would like to remind delegates that we have 10 speakers for this morning. It is very important that each delegation keep its intervention within the limit of 10 minutes. I hope delegates will allow me to remind them when their speech is running a little long. This is not to be unfair but to be fair to everyone else. We have a rather long day.

Ms. García (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, allow me to express the congratulations of the delegation of Mexico upon your election, Sir, to preside over our work. We are confident that under your leadership, the Disarmament Commission will make progress in its deliberations on the two substantive items on our agenda, whose consideration began in the 2000 session.

We also wish to express our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau and to express our appreciation to Mr. Dhanapala for his irreproachable leadership at the head of the Department for Disarmament Affairs over the last five years.

The convening of the current session — at a time when the international community needs to find real and effective formulas for collective security that truly prevent conflicts, that prohibit the use of force in international relations and that lead parties to exhaust all peaceful means for resolving disputes — represents a challenge to redouble our efforts in this forum to

Twenty-five years ago, in paragraph 118 of the Final Document of the first special session to be devoted to disarmament, the General Assembly agreed that our Commission, as a deliberative body, comprised of all Member States of the United Nations, should consider and make recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament.

Following the adoption of decision 52/492 on the efficient functioning of our work, the Disarmament Commission deals with two substantive agenda items in each session. In conformity with that decision, on this occasion we must reach agreement on the agenda items whose consideration we began in the session of June 2000.

As for item 4 of our agenda, ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament, while reaffirming the importance Mexico attaches to that issue, I wish to express to Mr. Alaa Issa of the delegation of Egypt our commitment to support him for the successful conclusion of the deliberations of the Working Group over which he presides. We consider that the work done by Mr. Yaw Odei Osei of Ghana, particularly with respect to the proposed structure, is a solid basis for making progress on formulating recommendations on this issue.

However, we must recognize that the identification of concrete measures to achieve nuclear disarmament is not an easy task. First, it is a great

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concern that the Conference on Disarmament has still not reached agreement on the establishment of ad hoc committees on nuclear disarmament and fissile material. Likewise, despite the urgent appeals of the international community, we still do not have the ratifications required for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

The second session of the Preparatory Committee of the seventh Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will be held shortly. While welcoming the decision of the Government of Cuba to adhere to the NPT, we express our concern at the announcement by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of its intention to withdraw from this fundamental instrument in the field of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. In that context, the Disarmament Commission must make relevant recommendations on the ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

With respect to agenda item 5, practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms, the delegation of Mexico wishes to thank Gabriela Martinic of Argentina for circulating a new version of her working paper. We are confident that on the basis of that paper and under the chairmanship of Mr. Santiago Mourão of Brazil, the Working Group will make substantial progress in the consideration of this item with a view to reaching agreement at this session of the Disarmament Commission. As on previous occasions, my delegation joins the efforts of other interested delegations to make progress in confidence-building among States in the field of conventional weapons.

In conclusion, like you in your opening statement, Mr. Chairman, the delegation of Mexico also wishes to reaffirm its commitment to promoting multilateralism as the means of achieving significant agreement on disarmament.

Ms. Cedeño Reyes (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to express my delegation's congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. We are confident that, under your skilful leadership, our work will be crowned with success. I should like, in my capacity as a Vice-Chairperson, to congratulate the other members of the Bureau, as well as the new

officers of the Working Groups on nuclear disarmament and on confidence-building measures.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the representative of Jamaica, Diane Quarless, for her outstanding efforts last year. We also appreciate the work done by our colleagues from Argentina and Ghana.

We should also like to express the appreciation of the delegation of Venezuela to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, for the dedication that he has shown for a number of years in the Department for Disarmament Affairs, as well as for the excellent statement he made yesterday.

The substantive work of the Commission is being carried out at a historic moment. This is a complex, uncertain time for the maintenance of international peace and security because of the implications that the conflict taking place in one Middle Eastern country has for world peace and for civilized coexistence among peoples. We advocate peace, respect for the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law, the strengthening of multilateralism and the democratization of international relations.

I should like to state my country's position with regard to the substantive items on the agenda of the Commission. With respect to nuclear disarmament, my country believes that this deliberative forum, the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons together constitute an appropriate international mechanism for achieving global disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation, with regard to both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

We stand in defence of international principles with regard to disarmament, and reaffirm our country's commitment to strengthening its objectives and to coordinating efforts with a view to exploring ways and means of eliminating those weapons that are capable of destroying all of humankind.

We are concerned that in recent years the disarmament process has not made the steady progress to which we all aspire. We regret that the Conference on Disarmament remains in a state of stagnation. Nonetheless, we hope that negotiations will soon begin

on a new instrument aimed at prohibiting the production of fissile material.

With regard to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, we welcome the increase in the number of countries that have become parties to the instrument. However, we aspire to and insist on its universality, as decided upon by the Conference of the Parties. Furthermore, we are concerned about the fact that the political will that is needed to implement obligations entered into through international treaties and agreements is not always forthcoming. We believe that the nuclear-weapon States must conduct negotiations, in good faith, in accordance with the terms of article VI of the Treaty, and that they must proceed to reduce their nuclear capability with a view to ensuring international peace and security.

With regard to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, my country has placed at the disposal of the international monitoring system provided for in the Treaty two auxiliary seismic stations, which will be part of the verification network. In this regard, we urge the States that have not yet ratified that Treaty to do so, so that it can enter fully into force.

As regards missiles, we believe that it is necessary to prevent their proliferation and support the idea of a legal instrument to regulate their use. Furthermore, my Government believes that the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty is of great strategic value for disarmament and nuclear-weapons control.

Although this may relate to another forum, I should like to emphasize that, in The Hague on 25 November 2002, my country signed the International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation.

As a member of the world's first inhabited nuclear-weapon-free zone, my country welcomes the consolidation of that zone through the admission last year of Cuba. We also welcome the proclamation of a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere and adjacent areas. In this regard, we support the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other parts of the world on the basis of agreements freely entered into.

With regard to conventional arms, I should like to emphasize that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, a number of important political and military initiatives have been undertaken, and my country has joined them with a view to promoting a climate of peace,

confidence and stability in the region. In this regard, Venezuela's foreign policy is based on cooperation and exchange. We believe that confidence- and security-building measures constitute a fundamental component of regional and global peace and security, in accordance with the specificities of each region or subregion.

We attach importance to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and to the work done by the United Nations expert group with regard to transparency in armaments and to the search for ways of improving the Register. In compliance with the provisions of United Nations resolutions, my Government recently sent the Secretary-General its nil report in the context of the Register of Conventional Arms.

We attach special importance to the second biennial meeting on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, to be held next July, and to the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms.

We are very pleased to note the progress that has been made in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

My country considers the limitation and reduction of military spending to be a priority means of building confidence and ensuring transparency in disarmament, with funds being redirected to the social and economic development of our peoples. My Government has been promoting such an initiative in various international forums with a view to creating an international humanitarian fund to alleviate poverty among our peoples.

In conclusion, we reiterate our hope that these three weeks of work will be beneficial for the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime for both nuclear and conventional weapons. You, Mr. Chairman, may rely on our contribution.

Mr. Ivanou (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like to congratulate you, Sir, your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2003 substantive session. We are confident that your diplomatic experience will facilitate a productive and successful session. You can count on the active cooperation and support of our delegation. I would also

like to congratulate all the other members of the Bureau on their election to their important posts.

The delegation of Belarus would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala for his statement. We share the Under-Secretary-General's views about the current international situation. Of course, differences of opinion among States regarding the use of force to resolve conflict situations and the importance of the principle of multilateralism in supporting and strengthening international peace and security complicate the search for consensus-based decisions on key issues on the disarmament agenda. The current session of the Commission is taking place against the backdrop of military operations against a sovereign State Member of the United Nations, in violation of existing norms of international law. The fundamental position of the Republic of Belarus on the Iraqi issue is well known and has been set out in statements by the President and in an official statement by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

The Commission has a key task before it at this session: ensuring the effective completion of the three-year cycle of consideration of the issues of nuclear disarmament and of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. We are not beginning our work in a vacuum; we have available to us two working documents, which form a good basis for productive discussions and appropriate proposals and recommendations. We would like to express our profound gratitude to the former Chairpersons of the Working Groups, the representatives of Ghana and of Argentina, for their efforts.

The Republic of Belarus has made a considerable practical contribution to the process of nuclear disarmament. Belarus voluntarily renounced nuclear weapons and completed their removal from its territory in 1997. It has ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and deposited its instruments of ratification in 2000. Belarus continues fully to implement its international obligations under agreements in the area of nuclear disarmament, in particular under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Belarus has destroyed 584 short- and medium-range nuclear missiles, as well as their launchers and support equipment for them.

We believe in the need to strengthen the Commission's final document on nuclear issues with respect to the following key elements.

Our delegation attaches particular importance to making the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty universal. Belarus also believes in the need to give legally binding guarantees to the non-nuclear States. We support efforts to elaborate an international convention on the issue of legally binding safeguards to non-nuclear States.

At the same time, we welcome unilateral statements by the nuclear-weapon States regarding their policies on renouncing the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

The Conference on Disarmament must, as soon as possible, begin talks on banning the production of fissile material for the development of weapons. The early establishment of an auxiliary body at the Conference on Disarmament would make it possible fully to focus on consideration of this issue in all its aspects.

Belarus believes that nuclear disarmament requires that practical steps be taken in the area of strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, including by strengthening existing, and establishing new, nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Belarus believes that the nuclear danger must be reduced through consistent and phased measures in the area of disarmament. Here we view the ultimate goal as the destruction of nuclear weapons.

The Republic of Belarus is pursuing a responsible and consistent policy aimed at meeting all of its international obligations, including those under the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. Having eliminated, despite the economic and financial difficulties, almost 10 per cent of all of the heavy weapons covered under the Treaty, Belarus has made a considerable contribution to strengthening regional and global confidence and cooperation. Belarus was also the first member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to ratify in 2000 the agreement on the adaptation of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty.

Belarus attaches great importance to elaborating bilateral confidence-building measures and views this area as one of the priorities of its foreign policy. Belarus stands ready to work together and cooperate with neighbouring States to develop and discuss a broad range of issues in the area of arms control,

transparency and confidence-building and security in the region.

Belarus has signed agreements on confidence-building measures with the Republic of Lithuania and Ukraine. The Republic of Belarus fully shares the concern of the international community with respect to the humanitarian aspects of the issue of mines, and supports the ban on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.

The Republic of Belarus views the issue of accession to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction in the context of receiving international financial and technological assistance for demining territories and disposing of existing stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines.

The Republic of Belarus is pursuing a responsible and transparency policy in the area of export controls. Trade in conventional weapons in our country is governed by strict legislation on export control, on the basis of a single procedure for all categories of weapons and dual-use goods.

Our country's acceptance in 2002 by the Nuclear Suppliers Group was proof of Belarus's strict compliance with internationally recognized norms of export control.

Belarus is certain that the progressive movement from simple to more complex bilateral, multilateral measures and arrangements will create a solid basis for preventing armed conflicts and strengthening national and regional security, which, in turn, constitute part and parcel of the current architecture of the comprehensive and indivisible international security system.

Confidence-building measures and arms control regimes must be developed that take into account objective realities in the area of the development of new technologies for conventional weapons, in particular the rapid advances being made in that context. In this regard, Belarus believes that confidence-building measures need also to encompass such important elements of modern tactics and warfare as naval activities and the aviation component.

In conclusion, let me, on behalf of the Republic of Belarus, express the hope that this will be a

successful and effective session of the Disarmament Commission.

Mr. Gosal (Canada): Allow me also to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of this session of the Disarmament Commission.

(spoke in French)

I am honoured to join the representatives of other Member States who have gathered here to take part in the opening session of the Disarmament Commission.

The imperative for nuclear disarmament remains, as always, fundamental to international peace and security. Canada continues to believe that the elimination of nuclear weapons can be achieved, sooner rather than later, by universal adherence to and compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference established 13 practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to achieve complete disarmament. These 13 steps provide the world with a road map to achieve what successive generations have sought since 1945: a world without nuclear weapons.

Since the establishment of the NPT's 13 practical steps, there have been both successes and setbacks. Recent positive steps include the Treaty of Moscow, which commits the United States and the Russian Federation to significant reductions in their nuclear stockpiles. We call on the Russian Government to ratify the Treaty as soon as possible. The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, launched in Canada last year at the Group of Eight Summit in Kananaskis, is helping Russia dispose of its stockpiles of nuclear and chemical materials. Cuba's adherence to the NPT was a most welcome addition to the nearly universal commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, as was its ratification of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. Canada also welcomes the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation that will allow the last three Russian nuclear reactors capable of producing weapons-grade fissile material to close down by 2009.

(spoke in English)

We note, however, that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains 13 ratifications short of entry into force and that the Conference on Disarmament remains without a

programme of work to enable much-needed negotiation of agreements on a fissile material cut-off treaty, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, as well as work towards nuclear disarmament. Of great concern is the announced withdrawal of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from the NPT. We reiterate our call to that country to reverse its decision to withdraw from the NPT.

This year the Commission, during its deliberations on ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament, has an opportunity to contribute to forward movement on the road to nuclear disarmament. Canada is pleased that the Chair's revised discussion paper incorporates all of the NPT's 13 practical steps. We are also pleased that the Chair has built upon those solid foundations by developing a useful compendium of recent events in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and has included in it elements such as the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, the conclusion of safeguard agreements and of Additional Protocols with the IAEA and steps toward the non-proliferation of ballistic missiles.

The recommendations that the Commission will decide upon at this session as the outcome of its work will provide valuable guidance to the General Assembly. In addition, the outcome will undoubtedly inform and contribute to the upcoming session of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference, in May, and to the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) this fall.

Canada hopes that the Commission's recommendations will emphasize that achieving nuclear disarmament requires unwavering support — both material and political — for the international framework of treaties and mechanisms we established more than 50 years ago. We should also emphasize the importance of full implementation, strengthened transparency, and the need to universalize acceptance of those norms, to improve verification measures and to strengthen the multilateral means to address issues of non-compliance. Canada hopes the Commission's recommendations will also recognize the invaluable work of the community of non-governmental organizations in efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament.

I now turn to the second item on the agenda: confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. In 1991, sharing a common vision, the European Community, Japan and Canada catalysed the initiative to establish the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. In 2001, we celebrated the Register's tenth anniversary and its success in building a global norm that promotes transparency in order to build confidence. The Register has fulfilled a key role as a confidence-building measure designed to improve the security of States both within their regions and, ultimately, globally. The Register and the United Nations instrument for reporting military expenditures are the only two global transparency instruments that the United Nations includes as a part of its initiative for transparency in armaments.

Lessons learned from regional workshops held in 2002 and 2003 highlighted the value of the Register as a confidence-building measure. The instruments aimed at transparency in armaments have been useful in breaking down the traditional resistance to declaring weapons holdings as well as military budgets. Those lessons have also demonstrated that, although achieving transparency is not always easy, it is possible, especially in a regional setting. When a group of nations determine together to institute transparent practices and to provide data on conventional weapons transfers and military budgets, initial resistance on the part of some is replaced by a cooperative approach.

For instance, both the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organization of American States (OAS) have considered how to integrate aspects of the Register and of the instrument for reporting military expenditures into their respective regional reporting instruments. The OAS is to be commended for the recent entry into force of the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions. The Convention sets up a concrete mechanism for strengthening regional stability through mutual confidence and transparency, and it imposes a legally binding obligation whereby States parties report annually to the OAS on imports and exports of conventional weapons covered by the Convention.

Ensuring that the Register continues to be relevant is an important challenge. In that regard, we strongly support, among other things, positive consideration of expanding the range of items covered by the Register. Increasing the level of participation in

the Register with the aim of universalization should also be a priority. The 2003 Group of Governmental Experts, which began consultations in March, is working on the premise that, in view of the scarcity and the limited nature of global arrangements devoted to conventional weapons, it has a duty to improve and further develop the Register.

Canada is pleased that the Chair's revised discussion paper recognizes the value of the creation of national legislation and administrative regulations on arms export, import, transit, re-export and diversion as confidence-building measures. The Commission could recommend that Member States submit their national laws, regulations and procedures on export, import, transit or retransfer — as well as changes therein — to the Secretary-General and that they make such information available to Member States, as appropriate. The Commission could also recommend that the United Nations play a larger role in the follow-up to the information emerging from the Register. Ways and means to detect build-ups and consistent mismatches could thus be identified and addressed.

(spoke in French)

Canada is a fervent supporter of the Register and of the instrument for the reporting of military expenditures and will continue to promote their universalization and support. The Commission can rely on our determination to ensure that the efforts undertaken through regional workshops bear fruit. Ultimately, that will enable us to attain our objectives of transparency and universal participation in both United Nations instruments in this field.

In conclusion, I should like to say that the delegation of Canada looks forward to participating in the discussions and the negotiations of both Working Groups. We are committed to cooperating with you, Mr. Chairman, with the rest of the Bureau and with other Member States to ensure that the Commission presents concrete recommendations that will bring us closer to attaining our common objectives.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The delegation of Cuba congratulates you, Sir, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission during this substantive session, and extends those congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made yesterday by the delegation of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Disarmament Commission is meeting at a time when Iraq is the object of a military aggression. We have said that this is a war that is not only unnecessary — carried out under pretexts that are not credible and that violate international law — but also unequal, because one of the aggressors is the hegemonic superpower, with all its overwhelming military and technological force.

With this war, the Government of the United States is strengthening its unilateralist intentions, as shown in the negotiations on a protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, in the derogation from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, in the progress in deploying a national anti-missile defence system and in its opposition to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, among other well-known examples.

That is compounded by the elaboration of the so-called revised nuclear posture and by the new national strategy to combat weapons of mass destruction, in which the potential uses of nuclear weapons are broadened, including States that do not possess them among potential targets. At the same time, there is an attempt to impose on us the so-called doctrine of pre-emptive war, which clearly violates the spirit and the letter of the Charter of the United Nations.

Cuba upholds the need to preserve multilateralism in international relations, including in the sphere of disarmament and arms control. In that context, it should be recalled that in the fifty-seventh regular session of the General Assembly, resolution 57/63, entitled "Promotion of multilateralism in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation", was adopted by a large majority. That fact demonstrates the international community's clear support for that important subject.

Moreover, like other non-aligned countries, Cuba rejects the unfounded accusations of non-compliance with international instruments related to weapons of mass destruction and reaffirms that States parties, in making such allegations, must use the procedures established in those instruments and must present the necessary evidence.

As Member States have agreed for over 20 years, nuclear disarmament should continue to be the top priority in the field of disarmament. Despite the assertion that the so-called cold war period is over, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons continue to imperil the very existence of humanity. In addition, defence doctrines have been established that expand the number of situations in which nuclear weapons could be employed.

It is not possible to resolve all problems posed by nuclear weapons through the non-proliferation approach alone. In that regard, we reiterate that the total elimination of such weapons will be the sole guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be used by the States that possess them and that the threat of their use will not be a way of exerting pressure in relations with other States.

Despite the complex international situation and the ongoing hostility against our country by the principal nuclear Power — the sole such Power in our hemisphere — Cuba recently became a State party to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean — better known as the Treaty of Tlatelolco — and to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Our country is strictly complying with the provisions of those Treaties. We would also like to reiterate that our adherence to the NPT must not be interpreted as a change in Cuba's well-known position vis-à-vis the shortcomings of the Treaty and its discriminatory nature. Along with other States parties that share our concerns about the limitations of the Treaty and the lack of compliance by nuclear Powers with their commitments under the Treaty, Cuba will work actively during the preparatory process for the next NPT Review Conference.

At the moment, the Disarmament Commission is in practice the sole universal deliberative body discussing questions associated with concrete ways and means of achieving nuclear disarmament. It is worth recalling that, unfortunately, the Conference on Disarmament at Geneva has been prevented from agreeing on a programme of work in recent years. In that regard, the final document to be adopted by Working Group I on the subject of ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament cannot be limited to theoretical concepts. It is of particular importance that deliberations on that agenda item be aimed at adopting

concrete recommendations on how to make progress towards nuclear disarmament.

The section on achievements and the situation in the field of nuclear disarmament must contain a critical and objective assessment of the current situation in that field. In that regard, we appreciate the fact that the new version of the Working Group I document is more detailed and that it generally provides a good foundation upon which to continue and conclude negotiations on this item this year. First and foremost, to that end, there is a need for political will on the part of all States, in particular on the part of nuclear-weapon States.

We believe that the new version of the document prepared by the past Chairperson of Working Group II on the issue of practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms is a good point of reference to guide our discussions. Our delegation would like to reaffirm the voluntary nature of confidence-building measures. We would also like to reiterate that in this field it is not possible to impose specific prescriptions that may work very well in given countries and regions but not necessarily in others. It is therefore a basic principle that due account must be taken of the fact that, in the final analysis, such measures depend upon concrete security conditions and other factors in a given country, region and subregion.

The design and implementation of confidence-building measures also presupposes strict respect for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including in particular non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respect for sovereignty, the non-use or threat of use of force, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the right to self-defence and the implementation of international treaties in good faith. It is also important to take into account the complementary nature of confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels and those at the international level.

Little progress can be made towards achieving true confidence if the military threats and hostile and aggressive policies to which some States are subjected are not eliminated; if military doctrines are put in place that favour the concept of offensive measures, including preventive war, against States or groups considered hostile; and if new, more devastating conventional weapons are designed and produced.

We are prepared to make a constructive contribution to the success of this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, which should achieve the results needed and awaited by the international community. I assure you, Mr. Chairman, of our support.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): My delegation would like to join others in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of this important Commission. We also extend our best wishes to the other members of the Bureau.

Months ago, the Holy See delegation stated before the First Committee at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly that the old policies of nuclear deterrence that prevailed during the cold war must now yield to concrete disarmament measures based on dialogue and multilateral negotiation, which are essential values in the disarmament process. Through the instruments of international law, they facilitate the peaceful resolution of disputes, help better mutual understanding and foster a climate of trust, cooperation and respect among all States. In that way they promote the effective affirmation of the culture of life and peace, which is based upon the values of responsibility, solidarity and dialogue.

Those words seem all the more significant today, when the world once again finds itself listening to the mounting rumble of arms. We are confronted by two opposing perspectives. The first is based on the conviction that conflicts can be resolved through a determined and broad-based willingness to negotiate effectively in the light of the ways and wisdom of the law. The second perspective maintains that force is more efficacious and direct in the face of elusive and re-emergent threats. However, the latter appears only to reduce international cooperation in disarmament rather than enhance it, inducing negative repercussions on multilateralism. A clear message in favour of the force of law and not the law of force should emerge from this substantive session.

We have come to this forum with a precise objective: to sustain ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament, as well as practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. The techniques of mediation, negotiation and verification are all being advanced today. The arms-

control system appears to have worked effectively and to have brought significant results these last decades. It only needs strengthening to better solve new challenges and meet new threats. Therefore, the Holy See wishes to reiterate its support for the principles and for the effective implementation of the objectives laid down in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as well as in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference.

The extraordinary mobilization of men and women that we see almost everywhere these days indicates that the cause of peace is making great progress in the conscience of humanity. It shows increasingly as an aspiration among peoples to live in security, in justice, in hope and in a culture of peace that — and it is good to remember this — is centred on the value of the human being and on respectful dialogue and coexistence among peoples.

The awareness of the most emphasized interdependence among nations and of the risks of reciprocal destruction requires a major accent on multilateralism, which, far from putting undue emphasis on force or selective treaty enforcement, requires all States and individuals to enforce decisively the laws and procedures that have been established with respect to nuclear disarmament and the elimination of the threats posed by conventional arms.

This is the moment at which each one of us, aware of the gravity of the present situation, when law must be chosen to prevail over force, must be animated by a profound sense of responsibility towards the disarmament process. The most effective way to make every member of the international community comply with its own commitments appears to be the clear willingness of everyone and of all States to comply with their own commitments within treaties and between them in a genuine spirit of multilateralism.

Mr. Acuña (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your election and, through you, all the new members of the Bureau. My delegation also wishes to extend its congratulations and thanks to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, who will very soon be leaving his important post, for his excellent handling of these matters over the past five years and for having brought to his leadership a skill and a sense of direction that deserve our utmost appreciation. We are particularly

grateful for his statement in this general exchange of views.

My delegation shares many of the views and concerns that have been expressed by preceding speakers in this forum. In particular, we welcomed your words, Sir, and those of Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala with special interest.

With the current particular situation in Iraq — the roots of which are to be found in a combination of factors related to the implementation of norms and obligations of international disarmament and which has aroused the attention and concern of the world — disarmament in itself remains of a high priority value, understood as a position held by the international community and as a goal that it intends to achieve. That goal is the attainment of the peaceful coexistence and security of States in a world that, ideally, would be free of the threat of weapons.

While States, historically and individually, have required the potential or effective backing of weapons to ensure their existence and to achieve peace and security, the concept adopted with the drafting of the United Nations Charter — one that has steadily evolved throughout the important disarmament process that was patiently negotiated and adopted throughout the course of the second half of the twentieth century and which we must continue to improve upon in the twenty-first — is clearly aimed at achieving the peaceful coexistence and security of nations without the use or threat of weapons. In this endeavour, a great deal remains to be done.

While the international community has registered progress and setbacks in this endeavour, we are convinced that they are part of a process that is long-term and irreversible. Today, the multilateral disarmament agenda, entrusted to the Conference on Disarmament, is at a standstill. For its part, the Disarmament Commission did not hold a session in 2002, a time when, as Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala reminded us, we should have been celebrating its 50 years of existence. We must make progress in this Commission and reach decisions on the priority issue of disarmament in its multilateral aspects so as to achieve consensus conclusions on the two main substantive agenda items.

As you pointed out with great wisdom, Sir, the challenges confronting the Commission require its members to proceed with prudence and pragmatism.

We must be cautious and measured in the face of the complexities of the present and the uncertainties of the future if we are to ensure that the results of our efforts truly serve the interests of future generations. To that end, we have the two texts submitted by the Chairpersons of the Working Groups on the two agenda items. We are grateful to them for their work and for the valuable documents they have submitted to us.

As we know, nuclear disarmament, the topic of Working Group I, enjoys priority in the general context of disarmament. We believe that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is an essential goal for all humankind. In this regard, we support all nuclear disarmament measures, be they unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, and consider them to be irreversible. We also support the strict observance of the non-proliferation regime, which must become universal in scope. The Conference on Disarmament has made no progress in this field, and the 13 measures agreed upon at the last Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons only reflect limited progress.

The issue of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms, being examined by Working Group II, is one that we have worked on with particular interest and effort in the Latin American region. Since the beginning of the 1990s, my country has been actively involved in that process in conjunction with neighbouring countries and at the regional level. We believe that we have made significant, positive progress on that issue through those efforts. We attach great priority to the issue, and we pay sincere tribute to the effective and selfless efforts of the outgoing Chairwoman of that Working Group. We also take this opportunity to welcome the incoming Chairman.

This session of the Disarmament Commission provides a pertinent opportunity to engage, through multilateralism, in effective and productive dialogue, which we trust will find inspiration in the profound need to further the international community's efforts to gradually but definitively reduce the dangers of weapons of mass destruction, including their potential use by terrorists. As well, by creating the right confidence-building measures, the Disarmament Commission provides an opportunity to prevent the uncontrolled proliferation of conventional arms — which is especially important due to their massive destruction of human life — which is the source of the

world's illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Ali Ahmad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman at this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election. We are confident that your efforts and experience will help us draw up guidelines enabling us to make progress in the disarmament process.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

My delegation attaches great importance to the deliberations of the Disarmament Commission because it is the sole United Nations body entrusted with discussing the questions of disarmament objectively and thoroughly with a view to agreeing on guidelines on ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament and on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms.

It is regrettable that this substantive session coincides with an unjustifiable war waged against Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom in defiance of Security Council resolutions and international law. The stated aim is the removal of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, but the undeclared goal is domination of the region. If it is, in fact, a question of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, we believe that even now there is still an opportunity to achieve that goal by peaceful means. The mechanism is provided by Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 1284 (1999) and 1441 (2002). The inspectors could continue their work on the basis of the positive cooperation demonstrated by Iraq, according to the inspection reports to the Security Council. There is a need to return to international legitimacy and respect for international law under the aegis of the United Nations and the Security Council and to deal with international issues in a balanced and just manner in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

With respect to nuclear disarmament, my country believes that it is necessary to give priority attention to nuclear disarmament in accordance with the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to disarmament, which set the goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons through

universal adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones throughout the world.

Here, my delegation reaffirms the need to take into account the specific nature of the political situation in the Middle East. Along with my country, other countries of the region and numerous countries throughout the world have called for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. All countries of the region have acceded to the NPT and have placed their nuclear installations under the comprehensive scope safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), with the exception of Israel, which is the only country of the region that possesses a destructive nuclear arsenal. It has refused to accede to the NPT and has refused to place its nuclear installations under comprehensive IAEA safeguards, employing baseless pretexts incompatible with the current international situation.

We believe practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms to be an important question deserving our attention. However, we must be objective. The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms cannot be considered comprehensive and sufficiently useful in the field of confidence-building, as it covers only seven categories of conventional arms and therefore does not serve the purpose for which it was established. We believe that to be comprehensive, the Register must include, first, deadly nuclear weapons and, secondly, conventional weapons that have destructive force no less than that of nuclear weapons. As well, the Register should be unbiased, including all countries. That would lead to greater transparency in armaments.

In conclusion, my delegation is ready to cooperate with you, Mr. Chairman, in order to make progress at this substantive session, in the hope that we can achieve a document reflecting the sincere will of countries to achieve complete nuclear disarmament and confidence-building in the field of conventional arms on the basis of transparency and good faith.

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Argentine delegation wishes to express its warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of this Commission. We also wish to congratulate the recently appointed Chairmen of Working Groups I and II. My delegation also wishes to

thank you, Sir, and Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala for the important thoughts that you both shared with the Disarmament Commission at the beginning of yesterday's meeting.

At the outset, in the context of the current international situation, Argentina wishes to reaffirm the importance of multilateralism as the guiding principle for resolving concerns in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

With regard to nuclear disarmament, we regret that, in spite of the favourable prospects opened up by the adoption by consensus of the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the results that were hoped for have not been attained. The nuclear disarmament objectives set out in the NPT will not be fully met without the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. The unequivocal commitment of the nuclear Powers to advance towards the complete elimination of their nuclear arsenals, the inclusion of the principle of the irreversibility of nuclear disarmament measures and, more generally, the 13 practical steps towards nuclear disarmament contained in the Final Document constitute progress in the right direction and should be maintained without preconditions.

The international nuclear non-proliferation regime comprises a range of instruments each of which is indispensable to the regime as a whole. According priority to some of these instruments to the detriment of others will harm the regime in general and derail the process of implementing the obligations set out in the NPT.

In the context of the fundamental character of the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency, we support the measures to strengthen the safeguards contained in the Model Additional Protocol to the IAEA safeguards agreements.

With regard to the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean created by the Treaty of Tlatelolco, we would like to refer to the interpretive statements made by the nuclear Powers when signing and ratifying the Protocols additional to the Treaty. Those interpretations allow for exceptions to the commitments made by those Powers regarding the non-use of nuclear weapons in the framework of the Treaty of Tlatelolco on the basis of claims of self-defence or

of links or alliances with nuclear-weapons countries on the part of some parties to the Treaty.

In this regard, Argentina proposes that the nuclear-weapon States be asked to consider withdrawing the interpretive statements that they made when they acceded to Protocols I and II, taking into consideration the following aspects. The Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established the first nuclear-weapon-free zone, has been in existence for more than 36 years and has proved its effectiveness with regard to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Latin America. The gradual incorporation of States, including the accession of Cuba in 2002, has made it possible to extend the Treaty throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. All the States parties to the Treaty of Tlatelolco have acceded to the NPT. Safeguards agreements have been entered into with the International Atomic Energy Agency. And the concept of the nuclear-weapon-free zone, as established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco, has become a model that has been followed by other regions, which have also created nuclear-weapon-free zones.

The example set by Latin America and the Caribbean in the field of nuclear non-proliferation should be recognized by the nuclear Powers; that could take the form of a withdrawal of their interpretive statements to Protocols I and II to the Treaty of Tlatelolco. Argentina believes that, if such a withdrawal is not possible, there should be a restrictive interpretation of the exceptions contained in those statements. Thus, the grounds on which the nuclear Powers would be freed from their obligation not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons would be reduced to one case: a hypothetical attack with nuclear weapons by a State party. Any other interpretation of the statements would, in our view, be contrary to the spirit and the letter of the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

Confidence-building measures are aimed at reducing the risk of armed conflict through the reduction of uncertainty, distrust and erroneous perceptions of the behaviour of other States of a region, thereby contributing to regional peace, security and stability. Furthermore, their implementation should not be aimed at merely avoiding conflict; it should also serve to deepen cooperation in the field of security, promoting greater integration among States in other fields.

The Argentine Republic would like to reaffirm its conviction with regard to the importance and usefulness of the implementation of such measures in fashioning a peaceful continent that can contribute to strengthening the democratic systems of its countries, ensure respect for the human rights of its inhabitants and benefit economic, political and cultural integration.

It was in this context that the first meeting of governmental experts on regional confidence- and security-building measures took place, in March 1994 in Buenos Aires, in fulfilment of the mandate provided by the twenty-third regular session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS). That meeting also marked the beginning of a process that continued with meetings in Santiago de Chile and El Salvador, laying the foundations for new prospects for hemispheric security based on transparency, predictability, confidence and cooperation among the States of the region.

As for mutual confidence-building measures of a military nature in the framework of measures agreed at the regional level, every year Argentina holds high-level meetings with countries from within and outside the region, with the participation of foreign and defence ministries. We also hold annual meetings with Chile and Brazil at the level of ministers for foreign affairs and for defence.

Working with countries within and outside the region, we are also involved in combined exercises, both in the field and in simulations, aimed at improving our capacities and the inter-operational nature of our respective armed forces. Such exercises have also been conducted with a view to working out cooperation procedures in the case of natural disasters. Officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, from the armed forces of various countries of the region have participated in Argentine contingents in peacekeeping operations. There is a constant exchange of officers, who visit military installations and participate in courses and seminars at military schools in Argentina and other countries.

Every year, Argentina submits the information requested by the United Nations for inclusion in the Register of Conventional Arms, as well as information on our military expenditure. We also provide such information to our neighbours and allies as a gesture of confidence and transparency. Along the same lines, resolution 1288 (XXIV-0/94) of the General Assembly

of the OAS is being implemented through the provision of a complete inventory of confidence- and security-building measures.

In 1999, Argentina published its first White Book on defence, the contents of which reflect important achievements and projects within the context of the profound changes that have taken place in our system of national defence, in particular with regard to the Argentine armed forces. The objective of the publication is to provide information to both the people of Argentina and the international community. Furthermore, there is a constant exchange of specialized publications in this regard.

As for the text of the document on confidence-building measures in the area of conventional weapons, we broadly agree with its approach. We would like to make a number of comments in this regard.

In the introduction, and before referring specifically to confidence-building measures, it might be possible to refer to the issue of mutual confidence and to underscore the fact that its strengthening at different levels will contribute positively to efforts that are under way in order to overcome longstanding threats and to confront new threats, concerns and other challenges to security.

This distinction among threats, concerns and other challenges is being drawn at the hemispheric level and distinguishes between traditional and non-traditional threats and those concerns and other challenges which, while they are not actually threats, could lead to situations that jeopardize the security of a State. Confidence-building measures are an integral part of a flexible security architecture that complements existing security institutions.

With regard to scope, it might be possible to incorporate the idea that progress in confidence-building measures through the strengthening of confidence among nations makes it possible to reorient resources that were previously allocated to defence to economic and social development.

With respect to the principles, it might be possible to add others, such as respect for human rights, humanitarian law and strict compliance with international agreements.

With respect to existing confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, the proposed list is exhaustive. Nonetheless, while most of

these are measures that must be dealt with in a military context, some need to be addressed in the context of security forces, while others must be resolved from a political, economic and social standpoint. It might therefore be suggested that measures be clustered on the basis of which forces or which institutions are responsible for their implementation.

Mr. Udedibia (Nigeria): I speak on behalf of the Group of African States and in my capacity as the Coordinator of the African Group on Disarmament and International Security Matters of the First Committee. The African Group joins previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your election as the Chairman of the 2003 session of the Disarmament Commission. We also convey our congratulations to other members of the Bureau. We are confident that under your able guidance and leadership, the 2003 session of the Commission will yield fruitful results. I wish to assure you of the full support and cooperation of the African Group.

The African Group also wishes to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, for the excellent job he has done in promoting the cause of global disarmament over the past two decades, both in Geneva and New York, and to wish him success in his future endeavours.

The African Group stresses the importance of the Disarmament Commission as a deliberative body that examines and discusses specific issues in the field of disarmament and makes recommendations to the General Assembly. Based on this, the Group considers the current session of the Commission very relevant in terms of the overall objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. The Group therefore expects useful recommendations to emerge from this session.

The African Group reaffirms its absolute commitment to multilateral diplomacy and its strong belief in the promotion of multilateralism in the field of disarmament as an essential way to strengthen universal peace and security and in the pursuit of our common interests in this area. The Group joins other member States of the Non-Aligned Movement in expressing its deep concern at the growing resort to unilateralism in addressing issues of multilateral interest.

The African Group is convinced that nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to humankind. The most effective means of achieving nuclear disarmament should therefore be the commencement of multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a convention prohibiting the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat or use of nuclear weapons and on their total elimination. Among the first steps towards the realization of this objective should be a commitment by nuclear-weapon States to immediately stop the qualitative improvement, development, production and stockpiling of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems. Pending the total elimination of those nuclear weapons, a legally binding international instrument should be established under which the nuclear-weapon States would undertake not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and not to use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States. The African Group stresses the importance of ensuring that any nuclear disarmament process, in order to be meaningful, must be irreversible, transparent and verifiable.

The African Group recognizes that the tenth special session of the General Assembly — the first special session devoted to disarmament — was a turning point in the history of multilateral efforts to achieve disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament. The Group, however, regrets the non-implementation of the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session, 25 years after its adoption.

The African Group notes the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the only multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. The Group is, however, deeply concerned over the lack of progress in this multilateral body, particularly its inability to agree on its programme of work. The Group regrets the continued failure of the Conference on Disarmament to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament and stresses the need to start negotiations on the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time-frame, leading to a nuclear weapons convention.

The African Group reaffirms its belief in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as a vital instrument in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Group endorses the practical steps adopted by the 2000 NPT Review Conference for systematic and progressive efforts to

implement article VI of the NPT, including the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament, to which all States parties are committed under article VI.

The African Group emphasizes the importance of consolidating the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. Nuclear-weapon-free zones play an important role in the maintenance of regional peace and security. In this regard, the African Group calls for the early ratification of the treaties of Pelindaba and Rarotonga by the States of the regions concerned to facilitate their entry into force, and it urges those nuclear-weapon States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the relevant protocols to the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, thus guaranteeing security assurances to the countries of the regions concerned.

The African Group strongly supports the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The Group calls on countries in the region to take practical and urgent steps for the implementation of proposals for the establishment of such a zone. Pending and during the establishment of the zone, it urges the countries of the Middle East to refrain from producing, acquiring or in any way possessing nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices, and to also refrain from permitting the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territories by any third party; and to agree to place their nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.

In line with the Final Document of the XIII Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held at Kuala Lumpur from 20 to 25 February this year, the African Group reaffirms its long-standing position in favour of the total elimination of nuclear testing. The Group stresses the importance of achieving universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, including by all nuclear-weapon States, which, among other actions, should contribute to the process of nuclear disarmament. The Group reiterates that, if the objectives of the Treaty are to be fully realized, the continued commitment to nuclear disarmament by all States signatories — especially by the nuclear-weapon States — will be essential.

Concerning the issue of confidence-building measures, the African Group remains convinced that the ultimate goal of such measures in the field of conventional arms is to strengthen international peace and security and to contribute to the prevention of war. The Group shares the belief that the essence of confidence-building is to guarantee to States a peaceful and stable political environment in which international relations are governed by clear, predictable and strictly observed norms of international law, which will create conditions that will promote the social, economic and cultural well-being of their peoples.

Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms should fully respect the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The African Group believes that confidence-building measures should not be a substitute or a precondition for disarmament measures and that they should not divert attention from such measures. Confidence-building measures should be developed and applied on a voluntary and reciprocal basis, and they should have as an objective the principle of undiminished security for all. The African Group emphasizes the importance of confidence-building measures at the regional level as crucial for enhancing regional peace and security. The African Group underscores the importance of transparency and verification processes in promoting confidence-building measures in disarmament.

The African Group notes with deep concern the recent trend of rising global military expenditures — which, according to available information, are likely to exceed \$1 trillion this year — and calls for reduction of military expenditures in order to release funds needed for development, especially the development of the African continent. The Group believes that reduction of military budgets is an important confidence-building measure that can contribute to global peace and security.

The African Group is deeply concerned about the illicit transfer, manufacture and circulation of small arms and light weapons and about their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world, especially in Africa. The African Group welcomes the adoption by consensus in 2001 of the Programme of Action on small arms, which outlines a realistic, achievable and comprehensive approach to addressing the problems associated with the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons at the national,

regional and global levels. The African Group reaffirms its belief in the implementation of the Programme of Action as an important confidence-building measure in the field of disarmament.

The Group supports all regional and subregional initiatives in Africa, as well as in other regions, in the fight against the illicit proliferation of small arms. The Group reaffirms its commitment to the Bamako Ministerial Declaration of 2000, containing an African common position on the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. The African Group believes that the establishment of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms constitutes an important step in the promotion of transparency in military expenditures.

Mr. Issa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express to you, Sir, my delegation's sincere congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission during this substantive session. Egypt is confident that you will conduct our deliberations with all the skill and experience reflected in your diplomatic record and that you will lead us to the success to which we all aspire. I also wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, for his wise statement and for his leadership of United Nations disarmament activities for the past five years and, indeed, throughout his political career. We are confident that his work will always be crowned with success.

First, I wish to reaffirm Egypt's appreciation of the vital role played by the Disarmament Commission as the principal forum for the consideration of disarmament and arms control issues and our intention to work in earnest, under your leadership, Sir, to arrive at recommendations with regard to the two substantive items on the Commission's agenda: ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament and practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. We hope that other members, in addressing those issues and the proposed recommendations, will adopt a balanced approach that will strike a balance between our shared hopes and what can be practically accomplished.

With regard to item 4 of the agenda — "Ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament" — the Egyptian delegation expresses its regret at the slow pace of nuclear disarmament, a vital issue to which Egypt attaches great importance. That position is

shared by other non-aligned countries and by countries members of the New Agenda Coalition. Moreover, our concern is not limited to the slow pace of nuclear disarmament; it extends to the growth of strategic concepts fundamentally based on the continued possession of nuclear arms and, in certain cases, on the possible use of such weapons, including against non-nuclear-weapon countries.

The Egyptian delegation reaffirms the importance of the political commitment enshrined at the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the unequivocal commitment of nuclear-weapon States to eliminate their nuclear arsenals with a view to achieving nuclear disarmament. We note the progress achieved in that regard by such States over the past two years. However, most of that progress was achieved in the context of political commitments that have yet to see the light of day.

In that connection, it is important to note regional efforts with regard to nuclear-weapon-free zones and the successes achieved in that sphere through the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Raratonga, Bangkok and Pelindaba. We hope that further progress will be added to those achievements with the declaration of Central Asia as a nuclear-weapon-free zone following Mongolia's initiative to declare itself such a zone.

There is no doubt that the Middle East region deserves special mention. For more than 25 years Egypt has sought to achieve progress in the General Assembly towards ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons. In doing so we have also sought to emphasize the dangers of nuclear proliferation in the region. We are making similar efforts with regard to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). During the 1990s we also worked to make progress in the area of regional negotiations in the Middle East. However, that work was not crowned with success. The Egyptian delegation would therefore like to reaffirm its intention to pursue its efforts during this session of the Disarmament Commission in order to build upon the Commission's 1999 recommendations with regard to nuclear-weapon-free zones, foremost among which is the establishment of such a zone in the Middle East.

With regard to agenda item 5, which pertains to practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms, the Egyptian delegation believes that confidence-building measures cannot be a

substitute for disarmament measures. However, complementary confidence-building measures are conducive to fostering an atmosphere leading to the strengthening of disarmament efforts. Confidence-building measures should therefore be impartial, objective and transparent in order that the countries concerned may agree on them voluntarily and in order for them to produce the intended effect. When used as complementary measures, confidence-building measures can indeed contribute to establishing security arrangements that are based on cooperation and transparency and the rejection of the use or the threat of use of force. Nevertheless, our experience in the

Middle East during the 1990s confirmed that confidence-building measures are insufficient in the absence of a strategic and political commitment to the principle of equal security for all that takes into account the legitimate security concerns of all countries involved.

In conclusion, the delegation of Egypt would like to reaffirm its full support to the Chairman in arriving at effective recommendations on practical confidence-building measures and on ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament. We pledge our full cooperation to that end.

The meeting rose at noon.