



General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

376th meeting

Tuesday, 18 February 2020, 10 a.m.
New York

Acting Chair: Mr. Markram

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Acting Chair: I declare open the 2020 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

Draft provisional agenda for the 2020 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission (A/CN.10/L.83)

The Acting Chair: As in past years, the Commission is convened today for a brief session to deal with its organizational matters, including the election of the Chair and other members of the Bureau for 2020.

I call on the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Unfortunately, the Russian Federation must inform the Disarmament Commission that the situation that called into question our ability to take meaningful part in the work of the Commission last year remains unchanged. For one and half years, in violation of its obligations under article 4 of the 1947 Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, the United States has been actively hindering the arrival in New York of the head of the Russian delegation, Mr. Konstantin Vorontsov, to participate in a substantive session of the Commission. Our repeated attempts to resolve the issue, including through the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, an extraordinary meeting of which we have

already requested, have not been the subject of a due cooperative response on the part of the United States.

Accordingly, our delegation must unfortunately request that this current session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission not be held, or that it be delayed until the United States complies with its obligations under the Host Country Agreement and ensures the inclusive, equal participation of all States Members of the United Nations in the work of the Disarmament Commission.

The Acting Chair: I would like to ask the representative of the Russian Federation if he is asking for a suspension or adjournment of the session in terms of rule 118 of the rules of procedure. If that is case, I would ask him how long a suspension he would like.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): To clarify, we are just asking that the session be postponed for the reason I mentioned.

The Acting Chair: Until when does the representative of the Russian Federation wish the session to be postponed?

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The session should be postponed until the United States complies with its obligations under the 1947 Headquarters Agreement and until we are able to meaningfully fully participate in the session.

The Acting Chair: There is a request to move to suspend the session until a later date.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

20-04238 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are not requesting a suspension of the session. We simply ask that it be postponed.

The Acting Chair: Under which rule of procedure is the representative of the Russian Federation making that request?

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are not referring to any specific rule of procedure. We just ask that the session be postponed until the United States complies with its obligations.

The Acting Chair: With due respect to the representative of the Russian Federation, we work according to rules of procedure. If he is referring to a rule of procedure, we can follow up on the matter. But we cannot work outside the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

Let me be clear: the representative of the Russian Federation is asking for a suspension — there is a rule of procedure that actually deals with such a procedure — which is exactly what he is requesting. Is it on the basis of that rule that he is requesting the suspension?

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): With all due respect, Mr. Acting Chair, I would ask if there are any objections to our proposal. I am unclear as to what the Acting Chair is implying. I have explained that our delegation is unable to take part in the organizational session because our head of delegation has been denied the right to be present at United Nations Headquarters, which the United States is obligated to provide under the 1947 Headquarters Agreement.

I see no objections in the room to our request. I see only the Acting Chair's attempt to refer to some other kind of rules of procedure or something else. I think I have been clear in explaining our position. We are unable to take part in this organizational session; therefore, we are asking that it be deferred.

The Acting Chair: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his clarification.

Mr. Horne (Australia): I thank the Acting Chair for stepping into the role. I think what he just asked the representative of the Russian Federation to clarify is the key question. Is the Russian Federation requesting the suspension of this session, or is it just seeking to take time away from our ability to deliberate on anything?

We have been dealing with this issue for over a year now. We had some pretty comprehensive voting outcomes in the First Committee that suggested that the vast majority of the membership is of the view that the United Nations Disarmament Commission should proceed this year.

Not hearing the Russian Federation make any specific request under the rules of procedure to suspend this session, I do not see what grounds there would be to suspend it. I suggest that we proceed, and that we proceed with the election of the Chair, as it would be the high priority of the Acting Chair of this body.

The Acting Chair: If I can just clarify: Is the representative of Australia objecting to the Russian proposal?

Mr. Horne (Australia): Yes, we are objecting to the Russian proposal to postpone outside the rules of procedure.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Is there any objection to the request made by the representative of the Russian Federation? My colleague the representative of Australia answered my question when he said that his country does object to the Russian Federation's proposal.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Before responding, I wish to ask the representative of Australia to please clarify whether all members of his delegation were able to come to New York to take part in this event. Has he had any problems in obtaining visas in order to come to the United States?

The Acting Chair: As a representative of the Secretariat, I have yet to conduct the election of the Chair. We are now moving into slightly different territory. The representative of the Russian Federation has made a proposal to basically not have this session proceed, on the basis of what he said by way of explanation. We have heard one objection to that proposal from the floor.

Mr. Horne (Australia): If my delegation had any issues with receiving visas and being able to attend this session, we would take matter up with the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, because that would not be a matter for this body itself to consider. I would urge the Russian Federation to apply the same standard that every other Member State would apply.

I think that, if the representative of the Russian Federation is of a mind to request Member States to afford their good will and postpone this session, I think the very least the Russian Federation could do would be to give us some indication of what its plans are to try to resolve things, if it has made any effort to try to move this issue forward at all.

What we find is that we are yet again in the position where we are unable to have very important conversations in a multilateral setting about disarmament. There is one primary reason that we are not able to have that, and that is the objections of a certain delegation for us to be able to convene a meeting. We were unable to convene any meetings last year because of that. I think the membership deserves some clarity from the Russian Federation on its plans for us to actually have this body commence its work.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of my country would like to join the delegation of the Russian Federation in the request to postpone the session.

The Acting Chair: We have heard one voice of support and one objection. However, there has been an objection to the Russian Federation's proposal, so we do not have agreement in the room on this actual request. I therefore would go back to the representative of the Russian Federation and ask him to clarify whether he would like to change his position, because there is already an objection to the position that he enunciated earlier.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I thank our Australian colleagues. I am very glad that the Australians have confirmed the absolutely normal procedure in cases where a delegation finds itself when its application for a visa has been refused, which is to go to the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. In our case, the head of our delegation has been unable to obtain a visa for a year and half now. From the very beginning, of course, we took the matter to the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. We also addressed the matter with the Secretary-General, who promised to continuously follow up on the issue and raised the matter in his contacts with the United States delegation. As far as I understand, a decision on the issue is pending.

As I mentioned in my initial statement, we requested an extraordinary meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. We have yet to

receive information on a date when such a meeting could take place, but we hope that it will be held as soon as possible. We therefore ask that this organizational session be deferred at the very least until that meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country is able to take place.

The situation we are encountering right now, which we ourselves find deeply unpleasant, is not caused by some position taken up by our country or our country's unwillingness to participate in the Commission's work; rather, it is driven by our country's desire to participate in the work of the Commission, which is something we are unable to do because the United States continues to violate its obligations under the Headquarters Agreement. I ask all of our colleagues in the room for their understanding, since any one of the delegations here could find itself in a similar position.

The Acting Chair: The delegations in this room have been following today's discussion. We have had a request for deferment. Basically, what we are dealing with — in my interpretation — is a request for deferment, which is the same as a request for an adjournment in terms of the rules of procedure, rule 118, if we want to apply the rules of procedure. Am I to understand that that is the case, or is the representative of the Russian Federation sticking to his previous point because he has already had an objection — from one delegation — to that proposal? The Russian proposal appears not to have garnered the consensus that he thought it might have. I would appreciate it if the representative of the Russian Federation could clarify.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I think the Acting Chair — Mr. Markram — is not interpreting our Australian colleague's statement correctly. Once again, what we heard is that he understands that delegations should have an opportunity to participate in the work of our meetings, and we are grateful to him for that.

With regard to the application or non-application of the rules of procedure, from what I understand, everything in the Disarmament Commission is decided on the basis of consensus, and that is what we appeal to when we make our request to defer our meeting again, at the very least until the Committee on Relations with the Host Country is able to meet.

The Acting Chair: I have listened very carefully to the exchange. Let me put this question to all delegations:

is there any objection to the deferment of this session to a later date?

Ms. Rodríguez Martínez (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to express in principle its recognition of the great importance to us and to the States Members of the United Nations of the work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the sole specialized deliberative body within the United Nations disarmament machinery. This leads us to also recognize the importance of allowing the participation of all Member State delegations without discrimination or restriction and of ensuring full compliance with the provisions of the United Nations Headquarters Agreement. No delegation should feel limited or unable to participate in these discussions with the expertise it has at its disposal.

Accordingly, we express our solidarity with the position expressed by the Russian Federation and regret that, after all this time, situations that would allow the participation of its delegation under the terms provided for — including in public international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Headquarters Agreement — have not yet been resolved. We reiterate our call for compliance with the Headquarters Agreement to ensure the harmonious participation of all delegations in these deliberations.

We therefore believe that, in order to preserve consensus, which we would like to emphasize, we should make every effort to ensure that, as far as possible, all decisions be in fact taken by consensus, as established in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (resolution S-10/2). We also believe that our delegation should support the proposed postponement of this session in order to allow a little more time for dialogue and hope that there will be a positive resolution of this situation.

Ms. Glavaš Kovačić (Croatia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

We would like to express our strong support to the Acting Chair in his effort to find a way through the current impasse, as well as to his colleagues. We

express our disappointment at the fact that, despite all this effort, we are confronted yet again a situation where procedural matters are depriving us of an opportunity to move things forward and focus on the issues, which are the core tasks of this body.

The disarmament and non-proliferation machinery has a vital role to play in order to handle the many challenges to global security we are facing today. Those should be addressed through multilateralism, which provides opportunities to come together and work constructively to improve transparency and build trust.

We urge States with issues related to the issuance of visas to raise them in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. In the United Nations Disarmament Commission, our mandated subject matter of disarmament and international security deserves our full attention. We are therefore of the opinion that the Disarmament Commission should launch its formal officially framed deliberations, including the adoption of its agenda and the elections of the Chair and the members of the Bureau, immediately.

Mr. Horne (Australia): I thank the Acting Chair and the other speakers as well. I think we have heard several delegations supporting a request for a deferment or something like that, but it does already appear that the majority of those speaking, given the number of States members of the European Union, suggests that we really should just think about getting down to business.

My delegation would be willing to entertain the idea of deferring this session, but there is a real fundamental question in this context, which is whether or not the Russian Federation is serious about having the session or not, because everything that we have seen so far from that delegation suggests that it is not. I think it would be a very reasonable request from the membership to the Russian Federation that it allow the election of the Chair by consensus, because we are aware of the situation that the impasse faced by this body has put you in, Mr. Chair. That is my request through the Chair — for the Russian Federation to allow us to at least have a Chair so that we can try to find a way forward through this impasse. I think that, if the Russian Federation were willing to do that, members would be willing to give some consideration to deferring.

The Acting Chair: I heard a couple of representatives respond to the request from the Russian Federation for a deferment. I will not entertain a long debate on this topic, because I am a member of the

Secretariat and I am not here to conduct anything except the election of the Chair. So, I will ask the question again: Is there any objection to the deferment of this meeting to a later date?

Mr. Bogoslavsky (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Just a few minutes ago, Mr. Chair, you said very clearly that there is a lack of consensus in the room regarding the ability to proceed with the beginning of the organizational meeting. It is our understanding that, without consensus, additional time is necessary to work this issue through. If a State that is interested in the work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission is expressing concern, then we need to apply the principle of consensus, on the basis of which the Commission has been functioning for many years now. We need to suspend or defer this meeting, at the very least to the time mentioned by the representative of the Russian Federation, namely, the holding of a meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. That is a fundamental principle of the work of the Commission. Given the lack of consensus, we believe that it is possible to address concerns expressed by delegations that cannot be represented at this meeting of the Disarmament Commission.

The Acting Chair: It is clear to me that there is not consensus in the room to proceed with this organizational meeting. We now have a number of delegations saying that we cannot proceed, namely, the Russian Federation, Syrian and Cyprus. I have heard from the Russian Federation and Syria, whose position, I presume, has not changed. I will ask Cyprus to express its position. We will then need to move on, because we are basically going around in circles and I do not want to waste any more time.

I call on the representative of Cyprus on a point of order.

Mr. Korneliou (Cyprus): I speak in my national capacity.

Cyprus aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union. Cyprus also chairs the United Nations Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

My suggestion for now is that we suspend this meeting for 10 minutes in order to try to see what is feasible and possible at this juncture. My request, therefore, is a 10-minute suspension, as a point of order.

The Acting Chair: With due respect to my colleague from Cyprus, I think everyone in the room is clear on where we are at. I do not think 10 minutes is going to solve this problem. We have been dealing with this issue for a number of months now. The request from the Russian Federation stands. There is no consensus in the room to actually proceed with this meeting. I intend, therefore, to gavel for this meeting to be deferred to a later date.

Are there any objections?

Mr. Horne (Australia): I appreciate the desire to not waste time, but this issue saw us waste an entire session last year, when we wasted a lot of money. I think it is absolutely appropriate for us to hear a response from the Russian Federation or from Syria, Venezuela, Belarus or the others that have supported the position so that we can hear what we can do to move forward.

I have made what I think is a fairly reasonable request of the Russian Federation — to allow us to proceed with the election of the Chair so that this body can have a Chair to enable us to work our way through. I know that, as a member of the Secretariat, you are in a difficult situation, Sir, with the responsibility of chairing this meeting. But I think we, as the Member States, have to take responsibility for putting you in that position. I think that the least that we can do as the membership is to ask the handful of States that are blocking all of our work whether they would be comfortable allowing us to elect a Chair in order for us to be able to proceed somehow. Otherwise, this will just keep dragging on.

We object to deferring this meeting until we hear from the Russian Federation and from the Syrian Arab Republic and others as to what we can do about that.

The Acting Chair: I now turn to the representative of the Russian Federation and to the other delegations that have requested the floor so that they can explain their positions further, as it is not clear to some where they stand on these issues. As I said, I think we are clear on where we stand on these issues, but I would like to hear from those delegations, per the request of the Australian representative.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank all of our colleagues who have taken the floor. What we have heard convinces us anew that there is a lack of consensus regarding holding this organizational meeting. We need to understand

very clearly that, until we reach consensus, we cannot move forward, because, as it was rightly said, it is the practice of making decisions by consensus that is the foundation of the work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

I would like to tell our Australian colleagues that we are not talking about a handful of States, as he said. That phrase is not correct. There is simply no consensus in the room. That is to say, consensus requires everyone to agree on a position, so it is a mistake to talk of a “handful of States”.

We also want to thank our European colleagues. By the way, I can also support most of their statement on the need to begin substantive work, which we are very ready and willing to begin. However, the head of delegation is not able to be present in the room. This absurd situation has been going on for over a year now, and we need to find a way to resolve it. That is in the interests of everyone in the room. It is therefore not procedural matters that are preventing us from moving forward, as was said in the statement on behalf of the European Union, but rather matters of substance that are doing so — namely, the fact that the Russian delegation, as much as it wants to, is unable to meaningfully participate in the work of the session.

As such, I ask that due respect be given to this situation. In our view, the organizational meeting needs to be deferred. Meanwhile, we are prepared to informally discuss procedural ways of getting out of this situation. I again emphasize that we wish to wait until the Committee on Relations with the Host Country is able to meet. The representative of Cyprus chairs that body. Hopefully, we will be able to find out in the coming days when that meeting will be held. I believe that this matter should be central to the meeting. After that meeting, it may possibly become clearer how we can move forward.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We appreciate your efforts, Sir, on behalf of the Disarmament Commission and its Bureau. As you have just said, this issue must be resolved by the States. We in Syria attach great importance to the work of the Disarmament Commission, which is the sole deliberative body in the area of multilateralism.

We have listened to some of our colleagues who noted that they do not understand the issue under discussion. I ask those colleagues if their delegations were prevented from participating in the work of the

Commission, would they accept that? Even if they would accept it, and this is a sovereign issue for every State, we do not accept that.

I do not want to dwell on this but, as you said, Sir, you have a specific task before you. There is more than one request to postpone this session until solutions can be found with regard to the visa issue and the outcome of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

I would like to stress two points. First, we work within the Disarmament Commission on the basis of consensus. If certain colleagues have doubts about this way of work, let them come forward and we will act accordingly.

Secondly, the issue is now in the hands of the host country. It has the ability to allow the Disarmament Commission to work and to continue its discussions by finding a solution to the outstanding issues raised by the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Morita (Japan): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this session. It is very unfortunate that this issue has not been resolved for about a year. However, at the same time, I think that all members understand the importance of convening this session to discuss substantive issues, in particular. Today's session is an organizational one so I just want to ask members who have concerns whether there are any visa requests that have already been denied. We still have more than a month so, as our Syrian colleague said, is it not possible to discuss only organizational issues, such as the election of the Chair or part of the agenda? That is just a question.

Mr. Wu Jianjun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would first like to express our understanding and sympathy regarding the visa issue encountered by the Russian Federation. We hope that all parties can demonstrate flexibility and good faith so as to rapidly resolve the problem. We hope that the Secretariat can strive to do its utmost to resolve this issue.

China also believes that the Disarmament Commission has always emphasized the principle of consensus. It has existed for 42 years, during which the principle has been adhered to by all parties. That tradition should be adhered to.

Mr. Mohd Nasir (Malaysia): I have listened very carefully to the discussion in the room since earlier this morning. My delegation of course noted the situation with sympathy and solidarity because we fully believe that every delegation has the right to its

full and effective participation in this session. There was a comment made earlier with regard to sovereignty, to which we fully subscribe. As a matter of principle, we believe that the matter must be resolved through consultations among the parties involved. In other platforms within the United Nations our delegations say that such an issue should be addressed through the mandated platform of the United Nations.

I also believe that the Disarmament Commission is a specialized deliberative body within the United Nations. We therefore all have a collective interest in coming to this room this morning because we believe that there is a need to have the discussions. My understanding is that, hopefully, we will meet from 6 to 24 April so as to have that substantive discussion. The purpose of today's session is to plan for that substantive session. While we fully understand the situation and are sympathetic to it, we hope that the matter will be resolved.

At the same time, I am concerned that we may move towards April without a clear indication or plan as to what to expect. Listening to the comments in the room and informal conversations with colleagues, I am a little concerned at this point because I am ill-equipped to engage in the procedural discussion, as I was sent here to talk about substantive elements with regard to weapons of mass destruction and nuclear issues. My hope is that we can continue with such exchanges among delegations so that we can have a clear idea of what to expect. We can then plan ahead for the 6–24 April session. In the end, I believe that we should not repeat what transpired before but do our utmost to make sure that the substantive discussion takes place in April owing to, first, the global uncertainty; secondly, the genuine existing threats; and thirdly, the absence of sufficient conversations among States Members of the United Nations. If we do not utilize the platform that has been set up for us to have that conversation, I am concerned about returning home knowing that we are just moving further away from the platform that has been established for us.

To summarize, although I heard you, Sir, mention ending the session and moving forward, I hope that we have a clear plan before we leave this room so as to know what to expect between now and the 6–24 April session.

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): As a country that has long been suffering regarding the issue of visas, we fully understand the difficulties facing

Russia and some other countries. Non-adherence by the United States of America to its clear obligations under the Headquarters Agreement severely undermines the multilateralism that, I am sure, all my colleagues value. The non-issuance of visas and further imposing restrictions on diplomats of certain countries prevent those countries from exercising their sovereign right to equally attend and participate in multilateral forums.

We believe that the Russian position is very clear and logical. We can all use the time provided by the deferment until the Committee on Relations with the Host Country convenes a meeting based on the request of the Russian Federation to send a strong message to the United States of America to be flexible. I think that it is not sufficient just to repeatedly ask questions concerning States; rather, we should tackle the root cause of the problem, which is non-adherence by the United States of America to its obligations.

This opportunity will be another test for the United States Government to respect its obligations. Furthermore, we believe that, in line with the long-standing practice of the Commission, we should take any decision based on consensus. When we do not see any consensus with regard to matters, it is wise to give further opportunity and time to the countries. We can then wait until the Committee on Relations with the Host Country convenes its meeting. We have enough time before the substantive session of the Commission so we should not be in a hurry. We fully support the Russian position and we too want to defer the session.

Mr. Jiménez (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our solidarity with the Russian Federation and any other country affected by non-compliance with the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. We regret the fact that after so much time there has still not been a specific response to the situation. We hope that the best efforts are truly being made to comply with the United Nations Headquarters Agreement and that we can continue our work, adopting decisions by consensus.

Although we are very interested in starting the work of the Commission, our delegation will always call on other States to maintain the spirit of consensus, which has always characterized our decision-taking. We therefore also support the deferment of this session.

Ms. Guardia González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Sir, for having convened this session, in

your capacity as Acting Chair, and your entire team for all their efforts to hold this organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

The delegation of Cuba supports the work of the Disarmament Commission and reaffirms its validity and relevance as the sole specialized, deliberative multilateral body to consider urgent disarmament and international security issues. We believe that the Commission should resume its substantive work as soon as possible. We fully support the Commission but the practice of taking decisions by consensus, as well as the principles of the sovereign equality of States established in the Charter of the United Nations and of full participation under equal conditions without limitation, restrictions or discrimination against any State in the work of the United Nations, must be respected.

As a country that is also affected, we support the deferment of the session requested by the Russian Federation. We believe that it is a viable proposal in response to the Commission's need to begin its substantive work by 6 April. We believe that more time should be allowed to hold consultations, convene the extraordinary meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country and take the necessary diplomatic steps in order to resolve all pending issues and make it possible to begin the substantive work by consensus. I reiterate, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all States.

It is deplorable that, to date, no solution has been found in the established forums with regard to the host country's delays in issuing, and denials of, visas despite all the efforts made by the affected delegation. We condemn the repeated non-compliance by the host country with the Headquarters Agreement, particularly sections 11, 12 and 27, as well as the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, which undermines, I emphasize, the integrity of the United Nations.

Cuba condemns the use by the United States of its position as host country to implement the Headquarters Agreement selectively and in an arbitrary manner in order to prevent representatives of a Member State from participating in the work of the Commission under equal conditions and without discrimination or restriction by delaying or denying visas. Deliberately affecting the ability of Member States to represent themselves at United Nations meetings is a threat to multilateralism and to the full and effective functioning

of the Organization and the Commission. It is the sovereign decision and sole prerogative of each State to decide the composition of its official delegation to meetings of the Organization.

We also wish to send a message to the delegation of the United States and call on all other representatives of Member States in this room to join us in such a call to ask it when it will put an end to its selective and discriminatory policy in granting visas. We also want to send a message to the United Nations and ask what more we can do in order to put an end to the arbitrary policy of the United States with regard to issuing visas.

The Acting Chair: There are still a number of speakers on the list. Before we continue, let me try and sum up where I think we are.

As the Secretariat, our duty is just to see to the election of the Chair and the Bureau. Clearly, we cannot reach that point so I am trying my best to conduct these affairs in such a way that we can move forward.

We have the request of the representative of the Russian Federation to defer this session. We have also had a request from the representative of Cyprus, who is Chair of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, to suspend this session for 10 minutes.

As a member of the Secretariat, I would like to exercise due diligence in trying to move the matter forward. I would not want to leave this room if we can in fact move forward today. But ultimately, I will respect your decision as Member States. I would therefore ask the representative of the Russian Federation if he has any objection to the session being suspended for 10 minutes so that some consultations can take place, notwithstanding the request he has already made to defer the session? We can then return and see where we stand after those 10 minutes.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We do not have any objection to the meeting being suspended for 10 minutes so that we can have a conversation. We are always in favour of talking and finding solutions. Before the session is suspended, Sir, will you allow me to answer the questions addressed to my delegation?

I would like to thank all colleagues who have expressed support for our position. This is very important. We are indeed in a difficult situation and I emphasize once again that we are interested in working on the issues within the purview of the Disarmament

Commission. However, we are unable to do that because, as I said, the head of our delegation is unable to come to the United States.

I wish to clarify to the representative of Japan that Konstantin Vorontsov's visa has not formally been denied. It has simply not been issued. The visa application has been sitting unanswered at the United States Embassy in Moscow. He also asked what actions had been taken. It is an important question. Perhaps I did not shed enough light on that earlier and some may have the impression that the Russian Federation has not done anything in the year since we had a similar unpleasant situation. That is not the case. Over that time, we have had at least five meetings with the Committee on Relations with the Host Country at which this matter was raised. I believe the Chair of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, Mr. Mavroyiannis, can confirm that. In addition, three letters were sent to the Secretary-General and responses thereto received.

Mr. Markham represents the Secretariat; his ultimate superior is Secretary-General António Guterres. Allow me to quote a paragraph from one of his recent letters, dated 14 February, in response to our concerns regarding the fact that no visa had been granted to, among other people, Konstantin Vorontsov:

(spoke in English)

"I wish to reassure you that I continue to regard the non-issuance of visas by the host country to representatives of Member States and staff members to be a matter of high importance. The Secretariat will raise these new cases of non-issuance of visas with the United States authorities on an urgent basis. As you are aware, senior members of the Secretariat and I have engaged and will continue to engage with the United States authorities on this matter to convey our serious concerns and requests that visas are issued in accordance with the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. In this connection, I note with the most recent communication sent to you on my behalf on 22 January 2020 by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs."

(spoke in Russian)

I think the position of the Secretary-General is expressed very clearly in the excerpt I have just cited.

I would like to propose a possible way forward. Perhaps we can ask the representative of the United States. If the representative of the United States can put on record that Konstantin Vorontsov will be granted a visa, or, if as much can be confirmed during the extraordinary meeting we have requested of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, then I am prepared to take it upon myself to consider changing our delegation's position on the organizational session. I think this would be the easiest and most logical way forward, including in the light of the position of the Secretary-General I have just cited.

The Acting Chair: As stipulated, I shall now suspend the meeting for 10 minutes in the hope that those able to make progress on this matter will get together in that time and seek a solution agreeable to all present in the room.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.15 a.m.

The Acting Chair: A number of delegations have had time to actually have some consultations. I would like to now open the floor to any delegation wishing to speak following those consultations.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: Following brief consultations with colleagues, I would like to make a proposal to defer our session, at the very least for 10 days, with a view to holding a meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, where we would be able to discuss this matter. We maintain the hope that, during that meeting, our American colleagues will be able to give us information that would convince us that our head of delegation, Mr. Konstantin Vorontsov, will be able to take part in the substantive meeting. I ask the Disarmament Commission to consider that proposal.

The Acting Chair: The proposal is to suspend the session for 10 days. I want to point out that we have a tremendous budget and liquidity crisis at the United Nations. Any decision we take to come back, therefore, will depend upon the availability of financial resources. That being said, Member States can request meetings.

Are there any objections to this session being suspended for 10 days?

Mr. Horne (Australia): This is not an objection to postponing the session for 10 days. Instead, we wish to clarify that we do not consider the two bodies to be related. As such, we want to place on record that

the outcome of the deliberations in that extraordinary meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country does not have a bearing on what happens in the United Nations Disarmament Commission. We agree to the proposed deferment in order to have as much latitude as we can in the consultations.

The Acting Chair: If I can be clear, we are suspending this session subject to the availability of financial resources. If I see no objections, I will proceed accordingly.

We will convene again in 10 days if we have the resources to do so. I trust that will be the case.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.