

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND THIRTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 22 August 2006, at 10.25 a.m.

President:

Mr. Anton PINTER

(Slovakia)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1035th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

In accordance with the practice followed by my distinguished predecessors in this office and with the outline of proposed activities for the presidency of Slovakia, this plenary meeting is devoted to a general debate on any subject related to the CD.

I have one speaker for today's plenary meeting - the distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands.

However, before proceeding to the general debate, I should like to make some opening remarks as Slovakia assumes the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

(continued in French)

It is a great honour for me to open this first meeting of the Conference on Disarmament today and to take my turn in the Chair after efforts accomplished with great skill by my predecessors, the distinguished Ambassadors of Poland, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation and Senegal. For me the greatest challenge will not only be to continue this term in the Chair in as active and productive a manner as possible but also to ensure that it culminates in an outcome which is positive and satisfactory for us all. In doing so I count on your support, your cooperation and your flexible approach.

(continued in English)

This is the second presidency that Slovakia has assumed since becoming a CD member in 1996. Its first tenure from June to August 1997 represented part of the CD effort aimed at achieving an agreement on the programme of work after the CTBT was concluded. Unfortunately, in this respect we are still in a similar position. Nevertheless, thanks to the P6 initiative this time, we can see light at the end of the tunnel. We hope that all of the distinguished CD delegations share this view. Encouraged by the address of the United Nations Secretary-General in June this year, we have the chance to overcome the long-lasting impasse in the CD. Definitely, we are closer to starting substantive work in the CD than in previous years. As usual, it is most difficult to take the last steps. Being aware of this, we are not discouraged by this obstacle. On the contrary, it is our intention to accomplish our common goal through discussing and preparing a meaningful report.

A week ago, on 15 August, the Senegal CD presidency organized an exchange of views on this year's CD report, for which I wish to thank once again Ambassador Camara very much. I consider that this was a very useful exercise. It provided me with valuable guidelines on the delegations' concepts and expectations with respect to the report's format and substance. This year the work of the CD has distinguished itself from that of previous years, and it could be labelled with many attributes like intensive, fruitful, smooth, productive, constructive, confidence-raising and many others in the same positive vein. The merits of this year's session are obvious primarily thanks to your contribution to the constructive and meaningful debates on all the agenda items.

(The President)

Consequently, I will be working together with delegations towards a report that would have the following attributes: it should reflect factually the proceedings and accomplishments in the Conference on Disarmament throughout the year; it should mirror the positive atmosphere within the P6 and the whole CD membership; it should carry this atmosphere over to the next year and generate growing confidence among the CD members; and it should prepare the ground for positive decisions allowing further development of productive work in the Conference on Disarmament.

Let me repeat that this is possible only with your support. In the spirit of multilateralism we will rely on your constructive cooperation, understanding and desire to renew the fame and reputation of the Conference.

While putting emphasis on bringing a substantive, constructive and meaningful report before the United Nations General Assembly through its First Committee, I also wish to inform you of some more technical details of the four-week programme ahead of us. A written outline of this programme was presented to the regional groups and at the Presidential consultations some time before. This is to repeat its highlights and to refine the information where necessary.

First of all, it is our responsibility to complete this year's deliberations with agenda item 7, entitled "Transparency in armaments". It is our plan to devote two sessions to this topic on Wednesday, 23 August and Thursday, 24 August, and if necessary on Friday, 25 August.

It is our hope and expectation that delegations will effectively make use of this opportunity to move forward the notion of this concept in order to address important issues on the disarmament agenda and global security in the present and in the future.

In addition to the above-mentioned activities, there is an IAEA expert presentation foreseen during the formal plenary on Thursday, 24 August, followed by an informal meeting at which delegations will have an opportunity to ask questions related to the presentation. As you are aware, this event represents unfinished business from May's deliberations. In this respect, I would like to express my appreciation to delegations for their ability to find a meaningful compromise with regard to the format of the presentation. The assistance of the group coordinators proved very helpful in this respect. Thursday's session will start with the IAEA presentation and will be followed by a formal and informal session on transparency in armaments. If necessary, there will be an afternoon session.

As suggested in our outline of activities, I will present the first draft of the CD report on Thursday, 31 August. By that time it should have been distributed to the delegations in all official languages. Subsequently, we will hold informal plenary meetings devoted to the preparation of the draft report on Wednesday 6 and Thursday 7 September. The last part of our term of the CD presidency will be dedicated to the finalization of the report with a view to adopting it by 14 September 2006 at the latest.

(The President)

I would like to conclude by wishing you all good spirit stemming from this year's CD work and its results reflected in our commonly crafted report. May your aspirations be addressed in a dimension that will bring sufficient contentment to all delegations sharing the Council chamber for the sake of the noble goals of mankind in the domain of disarmament.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Mr. Johannes Landman.

Mr. LANDMAN (Netherlands): Mr. President, let me assure you of our full cooperation during your presidency, which has the daunting task of coordinating an agreement on the report of the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me to say a few words specifically on this item.

This year has seen an impressive improvement of the work of the CD. The "P6" initiative has made a marked difference. Simple statistics will show that in 2006 we had more meetings, more interventions, more written contributions and more experts present than in other years in the last decade. Better still, discussions have been of high value, proving that on disarmament issues, progress is really needed.

To the Netherlands, it is clear that some topics are riper for negotiation than others. At the same time, this year's successful joint approach by the six presidencies has confirmed once more that at present there is only one avenue which will lead to a programme of work: that is by fully taking into consideration the reality of the varying security perceptions in the world. Already the ancient Greeks knew that in the same river, there are as many bathing experiences as bathers.

Last year, the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change put it like this, and I quote: "Without mutual recognition of threats there can be no collective security. Self-help will rule, mistrust will predominate and cooperation for long-term mutual gain will elude us."

In practice, a collective security approach implies that whatever you see as priority, the solution must include a serious combination of interests. So whoever maintains that only one item should be on the table effectively does not contribute to an agreement on a programme of work. This brings me to our upcoming report on this year's activities.

Of course, your draft will contain references to the encouraging changes in our working methods this year, and to the improved debates which have resulted from that. But the Netherlands considers it vital that in the report, all CD members agree on drawing the obvious consequences of this positive development.

These consequences could be the following: firstly, improved coordination between presidencies has proven to be crucial for organizing meaningful debate, and this coordination should therefore be continued. Secondly, at the same time, simply repeating this year's exercise in 2007 is not a meaningful follow-up. And thirdly, this year's approach of focused, structured debates has resulted in the clearest possible configuration of the topics at hand. We could conclude that our programme of work for 2007 must be a manifestation of this year's debates, an arrangement which reflects the spectrum of issues and gives each of them its relative weight.

(Mr. Landman, the Netherlands)

Last year, in the United Nations Summit Outcome, all our States agreed that “collective security depends on effective cooperation”. It would be embarrassing if multilaterally we can agree to abstract concepts like these, but not to their application in practice. That is why it is crucial that this year’s CD report includes some concrete signposts for follow-up. It should be possible by now to make the proposed draft mandate text on an FMCT our foremost focal point in view of at last restoring this body’s position as a negotiating forum again.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Canada.

Mr. MEYER (Canada): Mr. President, allow me first to congratulate you on assuming the presidency and wish you every good luck to bring this year to a productive close.

We had hoped there would have been some provision in your proposed schedule of activity for a dedicated session to evaluate the major innovation at the CD this year, namely, the six Presidents’ initiative, of which you are the last representative. I had already raised this point during our informal plenary of 15 August under the Senegalese presidency, and I would reiterate it in the formal plenary today.

We recognize of course that the priority of your presidency is to conclude the report that is to be forwarded to the General Assembly, and we are confident that this factual report can be agreed upon in good order and in good time. I think completing this official task, which frankly we see as having more of an administrative than a substantive nature, should not prevent us from engaging separately in a collective and informal assessment of this year’s experiment and what it suggests for our future.

I believe it is generally recognized that next year demands a quantitatively and qualitatively higher performance of this body. Notwithstanding the improvements the P6 brought this year, a mere repetition of this year’s timetable of activity in 2007 would, I suggest, fall far short of expectations. I think it would be extremely healthy for this Conference to exchange views on the pluses and minuses of the P6 approach and to express the expectations of delegations for next year. I can only think that you and the incoming President, our South African colleague, as well as the subsequent Presidents, would find such a discussion of considerable use as you collectively plot the future course of our Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Canada for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the presidency. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. RIVASSEAU (France) (translated from French): Very briefly I would like to come back to the ideas expressed by my two colleagues from the Netherlands and Canada and say that indeed we need to try and do better next year. The Conference on Disarmament has initiated a process of revitalization; I think we all agree about that. This process has taken various forms, it seems to me, the main one being the programme of the six Presidents, a programme of activities

(Mr. Rivasseau, France)

which, in terms of the rules of procedure, is in fact equivalent to an initial programme of work, even if it does not satisfy us and even if we want more, and we need to make further progress next year to improve it, to make it more effective, more operational, more focused and more centred and more negotiation-oriented, but we have also had, in the context of this programme, thematic debates which have been very productive and here too the improvement of these debates is a second track on which we could embark, I think.

Another element of revitalization was supplied by the appointment of Friends of the Chair, and we hope that somewhat more active use could be made of this next year. Yet another element of revitalization was the fact that a number of new proposals for work were submitted this year to the Conference, either proposals on such important issues as the cut-off, which is a quite vital element, or proposals on new issues, and all this bears witness to renewed interest in our forum on the part of a number of States. A final element of revitalization that we should not forget is that we have worked more this year than preceding years, but we can still do better because I do not think we have yet used all the interpretation budget allocated by the United Nations.

So I think these are the elements which we must work on next year, as my colleague from Canada said, to ensure that the Conference does not remain where it is now but continues to progress towards the relaunching of activities in the field of negotiation, which is its primary function.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of France for that statement. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor? I recognize the representative of Morocco.

Mr. BENJABER (Morocco): As this is the first time I am taking the floor during your tenure, let me congratulate you first of all on assuming the presidency of our Conference.

I took the floor just to add a missing piece to what you call in your statement a meaningful compromise with regard to the format of the IAEA expert presentation. As you are fully aware, the compromise was only possible with the understanding that the formal and informal plenaries on Thursday, 24 August, when the presentation is to take place, will be devoted to general debate and not be part of any structured debate.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Morocco for his statement. The next speaker is Germany, Ambassador Brasack.

Mr. BRASACK (Germany): Mr. President, at the outset I would like to congratulate you on the assumption of your high office and again pledge the full support of the German delegation in this endeavour, an endeavour which, as you know, as I do, does not end in September, but lasts until 31 December, and is of particular importance not only because of the report, which may be even more important this year than in previous years, as mentioned by some of the previous speakers, but because of the bridging function to next year. So I think the last presidency of each year and the incoming presidency are particularly important as regards that.

(Mr. Brasack, Germany)

I took the floor only to underline a particular sentence that was expressed by my Dutch colleague, and also my Canadian colleague, and I think I have also said this before. I would not like to go into all the pluses that we have had this year. They are undeniable and they should be reflected duly in the report, but what seems to be clear to me, as was mentioned by my Dutch and Canadian colleagues in particular - next year we cannot just repeat this exercise that we have had this year. We have to jump from the increased quantity - we have to make a qualitative jump. A qualitative jump means to jump into negotiations where possible. I think it is very important that during this year, the ground is prepared as much as possible to jump-start this kind of process early next year as soon as possible, and certainly we are, as my colleagues before, very hopeful that this might be achieved because of all the progress that was mentioned by colleagues earlier here. That was very visible and encouraging.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Germany for his statement and his words of support addressed to the presidency. Do I see any other delegation requesting the floor? That does not seem to be the case.

The secretariat has informed me that some delegations' pigeonholes are full of documents to the extent that it makes the distribution of new documents impossible. Therefore, I would like to appeal to delegations to collect documents from their pigeonholes regularly so as to facilitate the distribution of new documents.

As I indicated in the outline of activities, tomorrow the Conference will start a two-day focused, structured debate on agenda item 7, entitled "Transparency in armaments". At the first plenary of this series, which will be held tomorrow at 10 a.m., the Conference will be addressed by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Ambassador Roberto García Moritán, on the issue of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. If necessary, this meeting will be followed by an informal plenary meeting and continued in the afternoon.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.