

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND NINETY-SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 19 February 2008, at 10.10 a.m.

President:

Mr. Ahmet ÜZÜMCÜ

(Turkey)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1092nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Since this is the first day of our presidency, I am going to make my inaugural statement.

(spoke in French)

As my delegation takes the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament, allow me to say a few words by way of introduction. It is a great honour for my country as well as for myself to take the Chair of this august assembly.

I would first of all like to thank my predecessor, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Tunisia, Ambassador Samir Labidi, for the efforts he made to lay the foundations for our work for this year. At the same time I would like to stress the close cooperation which has developed among the Presidents of the Conference. I am grateful to them.

I cannot fail to express my gratitude to the Presidents of the Conference last year, who provided us with a solid basis for our work. I would also like to thank Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Secretary-General of the Conference, as well as his deputy, Mr. Tim Caughley, and all their colleagues for their assistance and their willingness to help.

Last year saw the 800th anniversary of the birth of Mevlana Rumi, an eminent Sufi thinker, humanist and world-renowned poet. The following lines are from his pen: "Truth is a mirror which fell from the hand of God and then shattered. Each person picks up a shard and claims that all truth is to be found therein."

It would seem that a mirror has shattered in this room. For more than a decade almost all of us have been working with determination to repair it. Apparently, several of us have a shard of the mirror and think that they have found the truth in it. However, what is true for some is not always true for others. This happens often, particularly in the multilateral setting in which we carry out our work.

Multilateralism is experiencing certain difficulties. However, it has by no means been shattered and has lost none of its importance. Quite the opposite - I believe it has been enhanced. It is up to us to collect the pieces of this mirror, which symbolizes consensus in our present-day world.

(spoke in English)

Turkey favours global, overall disarmament and supports all efforts in the field of sustaining international security through arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Turkey considers the CD to have a leading role in addressing the security challenges confronting our nations.

(The President)

As the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence Mr. Des Browne reminded us in his address to the CD two weeks ago, “global challenges require global solutions”. Needless to say, global problems cannot be solved unilaterally, bilaterally or in small circles of like-minded nations. Effective multilateralism is necessary and achievable. And for this, the legitimate security concerns of all States must be acknowledged.

No one questions the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiation forum. Considerable momentum has been created within this historic Council chamber of the League of Nations. However, in spite of many attempts, we have not been able to overcome the decade-long stalemate in which the Conference continues to languish. We all need to strive for a new impetus which will allow us to move towards a consensus on our future work.

Since the beginning of this year, a number of highly significant declarations have been made in the CD. United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon in his statement at the opening of the 2008 session reminded us that “this body has not lost its relevance ... but ... is in danger of losing its way”. The Secretary-General also pointed out that “to get back on the path to success, the Conference must rekindle the ambition and sense of common purpose that produced its past accomplishments, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty”.

I would also like to emphasize the encouraging expressions of support brought to Geneva by the Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdallah; the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence, Mr. Des Browne; the United States National Nuclear Security Administrator, Mr. Thomas D’Agostino; and the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sergei Lavrov. We also listened carefully to the message sent by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Yang Jiechi. They all voiced a clear signal of support for the CD. We now need to deliver and meet their expectations.

I am grateful to the agenda item coordinators. They have demonstrated able leadership and wise guidance. I am confident that the second round of informal discussions will be just as stimulating and forward-looking.

I look forward to productive cooperation with all of you. In close coordination with my P-6 colleagues, I will pursue intensive consultations and seek the possibility of a consensus building on the Presidential proposal crafted by last year’s Presidents.

I am fully aware of the magnitude and complexity of the tasks ahead of us in this regard. Bearing in mind the highest priority attached to our common efforts, I would earnestly appeal to all delegations to display the necessary spirit of compromise and flexibility. The cooperation and support of all will be crucial in attaining our shared objective to break the long-standing deadlock in the CD. Those delaying our efforts to cross the bridge need to realize that allowing us to make full use of the potential of the Conference would have a positive impact for all. This would enable the CD to achieve beneficial results for our common security, including their own.

(The President)

The commencement of negotiations in the Conference would provide a much-needed opportunity to demonstrate collective leadership and achieve meaningful gains on disarmament. The CD is indeed a negotiating forum, and a series of endless talks do not allow us to fulfil our mandate. There is an ever urgent need to take action.

Now, I would like to give you a general outline of our schedule of activities during Turkey's term.

An informal meeting devoted to agenda items 1 and 2 with a general focus on nuclear disarmament will be held this afternoon. Tomorrow afternoon, an informal meeting devoted to agenda items 1 and 2 with a general focus on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosives will be held. On Thursday morning and afternoon informal meetings devoted respectively to agenda items 3 and 4 will be held.

I have two additional pieces of information regarding the informal discussions which will take place this week. The Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, Mr. Gérard Brachet, will make a presentation at the PAROS informal discussion to be held on Thursday morning. On the other hand, we have been informed that the International Atomic Energy Agency will not be able to send an official to make a presentation regarding the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive nuclear devices, including the aspect of verification.

Next week, we will have two plenary sessions on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Informal meetings devoted to agenda items 5, 6 and 7 will also be held.

During the first week of March, the high-level segment of the Human Rights Council will be held in Geneva. As we are getting closer to this meeting, I would like to renew the appeal for senior political figures to address the Conference. Their participation and involvement will further enrich our discussions and generate greater interest in our work. The presidency will do its utmost to organize special plenary meetings for any dignitary who may wish to contribute to our work.

The final week of Turkey's term will be devoted to an evaluation of the progress achieved so far by the agenda item coordinators. As your President, I will listen carefully to all of you and in close coordination with my P-6 colleagues, I will endeavour to outline the elements of our future work.

In his opening statement, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, reminded us that the CD's successes are "distant memories". I sincerely hope that the current stalemate will become a distant memory quite soon.

I would like to end my introduction on a personal note. I take it as a promising coincidence that the ancient city of Gordium is located in central Anatolia, Turkey. You may recall that the

(The President)

problem of untying the Gordian knot resisted all attempted solutions until Alexander the Great cut it through with a sword. I have no intention to take a sword in my hand. The sword is in fact in your hands. And we call it “political will”.

I have Germany as a speaker for today’s plenary meeting. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Germany, Ambassador Brasack.

Mr. BRASACK (Germany): Mr. President, since this is the first time I am taking the floor under your distinguished presidency, I would like to pledge the full support of my delegation, as all the other members of the P-6 this year have. I would also like to express my gratitude for your impressive opening statement, just delivered now. I would also take the opportunity, since I am going to deliver a statement on item 3, to welcome and pledge support to the coordinator on this issue, my colleague Marius Grinius of Canada, and certainly we are looking forward to Thursday’s informal, which includes the presence of Mr. Gérard Brachet, the Chairman of the United Nations Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. We have him a second time here so we can continue this dialogue. If I remember correctly, it was under the EU presidency in the first half of 2007, which happened to be the German EU presidency, that the proposal was made to invite the Chairman of COPUOS.

The right of all States to explore and use outer space, that unique shared environment, for the benefit and in the interest of all humankind is a universally accepted legal principle. It is the concern and the responsibility of all States to ensure that these rights can be exercised in the interest of maintaining international peace and security. The cornerstone of international space law is the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. This Treaty places important constraints on military activity in space: it bans the deployment of WMD in space as well as military activity on the Moon and other celestial bodies. Germany continues to be a firm supporter of this Treaty.

The international community began to include an item on the prevention of an arms race in outer space already in the 1950s on its agenda. Since then, Germany has been committed to efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space, which has also been demonstrated through our consistent support for the First and the Fourth Committee resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly on this subject as well as in the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its two subcommittees.

Outer space, as a “global commons”, is now part of everyday life for most of the planet’s population, from television to telephone service, the Internet, credit card validation, weather prediction, disaster monitoring, urban planning, ATM machines and so forth. Space systems, however, are physically quite vulnerable to deliberate or even accidental disruption. Today’s space environment is already threatened by widespread pollution through debris, which by its nature is “indiscriminate”, growing saturation of the radio frequency spectrum and crowding in the most useful orbital positions.

Therefore, an arms race is not even needed to threaten secure and sustainable access to and the use of outer space. Besides, activities in space are increasingly of a “dual-use” character. Clear delimitations between purely peaceful uses and distinct military uses have become a

(Mr. Brasack, Germany)

meaningless fiction. Just as an example: space tracking and surveillance capabilities for monitoring debris, following satellites for avoiding potential collisions, inherently also have a potential for offensive space applications.

Germany has a keen interest in strengthening the arms control regime in outer space. Within the EU, the deliberations on introducing a code of conduct on space activities as a confidence-building measure have advanced. This initiative, which was also discussed at a workshop on “Security in outer space and the role of the EU” organized by the German EU presidency in June 2007, could be part of an incremental approach towards strengthening space security.

Germany would also like to see substantive discussions on space security taking place in the CD, and has been supporting efforts in this forum to improve security in outer space through arms control measures. We therefore welcome the presentation of the PPWT draft to the CD by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov last week. We are looking forward to constructively participating in discussions on the draft. In such discussions we would also like to elaborate on issues which are in our view not yet sufficiently covered by the draft. To briefly name the most important ones, these are, firstly, the relationship between a potential new instrument and the existing ones, particularly the Outer Space Treaty as the cornerstone of outer space security; secondly, the dangers posed by the development and testing of anti-satellite weapons; and thirdly, compliance and verification mechanisms as a central element of such a treaty.

However, as we all know, meaningful discussions on issues related to space security in the CD will only be possible if the CD agrees to a programme of work. As soon as the deadlock in the CD has been overcome, and when all CD members have crossed the solid bridges that have been built by the CD presidencies and the other CD member States throughout the whole session of 2007, the field will be open for even more substantial and detailed discussions.

We acknowledge that there is no international consensus on the need for further treaties and further legal codification of the use of space yet. It may also be right to say that there is currently no arms race in outer space and that the current military uses of outer space for surveillance, navigation and communication are legitimate. We would like to point out, however, that it is an easier task to prevent an undesired weaponization of outer space than to attempt to control and decelerate such a development after it has begun. This was also the underlying wise principle of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 and the Seabed Treaty of 1971, in addition to the Moon Treaty and the Outer Space Treaty, which I mentioned earlier.

No doubt any negotiations on banning destructive space weapons would encounter numerous difficulties, particularly relating to definitions and verification measures. Consequently, Germany considers the ongoing deliberations on a code of conduct on space activities as a transparency and confidence-building measure, a more immediate contribution to space security. As a longer-term goal, however, we are in favour of a new legally binding instrument on arms control in outer space, for which a non-legally-binding code of conduct to prevent dangerous practices in space could provide a stepping stone and eventually facilitate negotiations of a multilateral treaty which is more ambitious in scope.

(Mr. Brasack, Germany)

For space security is not only about security in outer space, but about Earth security. It is about preventing threats for countless future generations on mankind's one and only space vessel, a pale blue dot in space, as Carl Sagan said: our Earth.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Brasack for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I have no more speakers on my list. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case.

This concludes our business for today. The next formal meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 26 February 2008, at 10 a.m. in this chamber. In the meantime, the formal debates on agenda items 1-4 will continue this week, starting this afternoon.

This meeting stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.