

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.1113
14 August 2008

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 14 August 2008, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Ms. Christina ROCCA (United States of America)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1113th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

As this is the last meeting under the presidency of the United States, I will provide some concluding remarks at the end of this session.

Before giving the floor to the speakers of this meeting, I would like to seize the opportunity, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to bid farewell to our distinguished colleagues, Ambassador Levanon of Israel and Ambassador Fiori of Italy, whose terms in Geneva are about to come to an end. They have represented their countries and upheld their values with dignity and authority. On behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I would like to convey to both Ambassador Levanon and Ambassador Fiori every wish for success and happiness in the future.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Levanon of Israel.

Mr. LEVANON (Israel): Madam President, as this is my last intervention in the Conference on Disarmament before I leave Geneva, I would like to thank you personally, as well as my colleagues in the CD, for the professional courtesy and personal friendship that have been extended to me during the last four years. Considered to be the best club in town, the Conference on Disarmament has embraced me warmly.

I am also grateful during these years to have been able to witness first-hand the interesting momentum that has occurred in the CD during my tenure here. The outstanding efforts exerted towards resuscitation of the negotiation process are an achievement in and of itself. Some of you are no doubt sceptical when I speak about achievements - but everything is relative. Between the nothing and the everything, there is always a something. During our deliberations, we have demonstrated that the CD could potentially become an efficient instrument in the hands of the international community to address global security issues. Member States have all made a significant effort to work towards a better understanding of national positions in this realm. At the same time, the deliberations have emphasized the fact that for States, work in the CD relates to issues closely linked to vital national security needs. These national considerations must continue to be respected.

I am very much of the opinion that striving to achieve long-term goals without first identifying and addressing present ongoing threats might be counterproductive. It is incumbent upon the members to work jointly towards creating conditions that will eventually allow general and complete disarmament. In Israel's view, there are two fundamental threats to global peace and security that deserve to be placed at a higher priority within the CD: the threat of terrorism in all of its dimensions and the proliferation and transfer of weapons of mass destruction. These phenomena plague all regions of the world, and should be treated in a comprehensive manner in order to avoid the creation of future conflicts, internal and regional instability, and above all, not to harm civilian populations.

(Mr. Levanon, Israel)

The consensus mode in the CD is crucial to such an important forum. It is in fact the cornerstone of the world of disarmament. I hope that during my tenure I have contributed to the active and sincere discussions towards consensus-building, in both formal and informal negotiations, in plenary sessions as well as within the Western Group. I will depart with fond memories of the working atmosphere and camaraderie which were present during Israel's assumption of the rotating post of Coordinator of the Western Group. I hope that this will extend to other United Nations forums as well.

I personally wish you, Madam President, and all of my colleagues every continued success in the CD, and express my thanks again for your friendship and collegiality.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Israel for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Ms. FIORI (Italy): Madam President, first of all, thank you very much for the kind words addressed to my person. I would like to express at the outset my delegation's support and satisfaction at the way you have conducted the work at the Conference on Disarmament during your tenure. I wish also to reaffirm Italy's strong commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation as one of the original members of this body. Your efforts, along with those of the other P-6 members, as well as the skilful job done by the coordinators for the substantive agenda items, have brought about an interactive and constructive dialogue on the main issues of the Conference. Let me also welcome Ambassador Germán Mundaraín Hernández of Venezuela and wish him every success in taking over the task of concluding the work of the Conference for this year. You, too, Ambassador Mundaraín can count on Italy's full support in discharging your duties, mainly the adoption of the 2008 CD final report.

The depth of the deliberations held this year showed once again the varying degree of ripeness of the core issues to which the CD's member States attach priority. The debate so far has convinced us that the very viable solution to resuming substantive work at the Conference is to adopt document CD/1840 of 13 March 2008. It may be true that CD/1840 is "perfectible", but it is equally true that it contains a realistic and balanced proposal, and it still represents the best possible compromise on a programme of work. We have not been able to detect any particular evolution on the so-called "core issues" to justify a change on the four key points of this proposal. CD/1840 is the result of several years of "negotiations on negotiations" which we have undertaken so patiently. This year's exercise only represents the last chapter of a "distillation process" which brought us where we stand right now: very close to starting substantive negotiations in which the overwhelming majority of countries in this room are ready to engage. Madam President, you and the other members of the P-6 platform have our full support in your endeavours to revitalize this august body on the basis of document CD/1840.

It is not a secret that negotiating a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices (FMCT) represents Italy's top priority to be addressed at the CD. Negotiations on an FMCT have long been due. We are many years late on our time schedule, according to the decision consensually adopted on the occasion of the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

(Ms. Fiori, Italy)

Further progress has been made in the Conference on Disarmament on the FMCT issue. During the coordination of the Ambassadors of Italy and Japan in 2007 and 2008 respectively, the issue of an FMCT has matured to a point at which further progress is only achievable through real negotiations. These negotiations can only be “without preconditions”. This formula indicates the openness of the mandate which would put all delegations in a position to have their own concerns addressed in the course of negotiations. This includes especially the issues of stocks and verification. The problems are out there. In this very room we have the opportunity and tools to contribute to solving those problems. An FMCT would be a fundamental building-block to reinforce the current nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture.

We welcome also the progress which emerged during the discussion under other agenda items, namely under agenda item 3 (Prevention of an arms race in outer space/PAROS). We have taken note of the various views expressed on this topic. Some delegations call for new legally binding rules on this issue; others focus at the moment on the elaboration of transparency confidence-building measures/TCBMs; others again are of the view that no new legally binding rules are particularly needed for the time being. As part of the European Union, Italy is contributing to the finalization of an EU code of conduct on space activities, and we look forward to further discussing this issue in the time to come.

It has taken the CD five years of intense deliberations to elaborate document CD/1840. It is hardly believable that the Conference will be granted another five-year period.

Let me conclude by expressing my gratitude to the Secretary-General and all his collaborators for the outstanding work done, to the 2008 Presidents for all their efforts to revitalize the Conference, namely Ambassador Labidi of Tunisia, Ambassador Üzümcü of Turkey, Ambassador Bersheda of Ukraine, Ambassador Duncan of the United Kingdom, Ambassador Rocca of the United States and Ambassador Mundaraín of Venezuela, and to all the colleagues and delegations I have had the honour and privilege to work with. Let me pay tribute also to our interpreters for their patient and skilful job, which has ensured our mutual understanding. My final words are addressed to those who keep on following our deliberations from the gallery. They are a testimony from the outside world waiting for the Conference on Disarmament to live up to its task: a more secure world.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Italy for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

The next speaker on my list is a State non-member of the Conference, and I propose to give that State the floor. Georgia, you have the floor.

Mr. GORGILADZE (Georgia): It is unfortunate that the first time I have to take the opportunity to address the honourable members of the Conference it is under circumstances when Georgia has been subjected to an armed attack from the Russian Federation. The aim of the Conference has always been to create a secure environment in the spirit of the principles of the United Nations Charter. It is regrettable that today we witness the violation of those principles and commitments by the Russian Federation.

(Mr. Gorgiladze, Georgia)

I am sure you all have been thoroughly following the latest developments in Georgia. The situation has been aggravated on a daily basis in the course of the last week. The Russian armed forces have occupied large parts of Georgian territory and have been carrying out massive bombings of Georgian cities throughout the country, far from the conflict region of South Ossetia. The international community will have the opportunity to thoroughly consider, investigate and assess all violations of international law by the Russian side, one by one.

Let me note that Georgia has always responded with the utmost restraint and caution towards the provocative acts conducted by the Russian side itself or through satellite separatist regimes in Georgia. In all past cases it has been possible to avoid a major confrontation and keep the situation under control, to a great extent thanks to international involvement. The acts of the Georgian authorities have been aimed at reacting and defending the security of the peaceful population against acts of the separatist regime of South Ossetia. Georgia has acted in compliance with the rules governing the conduct of hostilities, while the Russian Federation has used this opportunity to carry out its invasion of territory. The Russian side continued its military action after the President of Georgia ordered on 10 August all Georgian troops to unilaterally ceasefire and withdraw from the territory of the Tskhinvali region. This was confirmed at the United Nations Security Council meeting.

Despite the statement of the President of the Russian Federation on the halt of military activities, Russia has continued overwhelming military aggression against Georgia. Even after reaching agreement on 12 August on the principles of the resolution of the Georgian-Russian conflict, mediated by the President of France, the Russian Federation has still continued occupying further territories of Georgia and bombing civilian targets far beyond the conflict region. On 13 August, the Russian troops seized the city of Gori, causing mass destruction and severe damage to the civilian population and infrastructure. These acts were done in grave breach of the rules of international humanitarian law, such as violation of the principles of distinction, followed by incidents of mistreatment of civilians and the looting of villages on behalf of the Russian armed forces. We would like to underline that the representatives of the international community - international and humanitarian organizations - have not been granted access to the territories controlled by the Russian armed forces. The number of civilian targets bombed or otherwise attacked by the Russian armed forces clearly indicates that it was not just collateral damage: apartment buildings, the Gori market and municipality, the Poti seaport, the railway station and airport in Senaki, the BTC pipeline, Kopitnari airport near Kutaisi, the aerodrome in Upper Abkhazia, the bridge linking eastern and western Georgia, the civilian radar station near Tbilisi.

In the recent past, the Russian side has repeatedly accused Georgia of rapid militarization. We once again underline that Georgia has never exceeded the limits set by the respective international treaties and arms control regimes. All allegations and accusations of that sort represent just sheer demagoguery. On the other hand, the Russian Federation has actively been supporting separatists by armed supplies, training, logistics. Russian officials have held the highest governmental posts in the self-proclaimed government of South Ossetia. As a result, with the support of the Russian authorities and Russian peacekeepers stationed in the region, the separatists have carried out attacks on the Georgian police and the civilian population in the conflict zone.

(Mr. Gorgiladze, Georgia)

There are strong indications proving that different types of weapons, including the 9M72 Iskander missile system, corresponding to the SS-26 Stone, have been indiscriminately used against the civilian population and infrastructure of Georgia. The deployment of such weapons against the peaceful population and civilian objects vividly reveals the inhuman brutality of the Russian troops acting on the territory of Georgia.

This is not a forum to be used for polemics and demagoguery so characteristic of the Soviet mentality, especially since Georgia had openly declared its commitment to abide by principles governing friendly relations among States, principles of democracy and the rule of law. Some may call it the “adventuristic line of Tbilisi” and criticize those “some countries” that supported Georgia and continued to do so. I, on the other hand, would like to express gratitude to those “some countries” as their support primarily stands up for respect of those democratic values, human rights principles and freedoms.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Georgia.

There are no more speakers on my list. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this point? The Russian Federation. Mr. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. LOSCHININ (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): Madam President, we welcome you and our colleagues from Italy and Israel, Ambassador Itzhak Levanon and Ambassador Lucio Fiori. We would like to acknowledge your contribution to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you success in your future work.

In connection with the topic that has been raised regarding the situation in South Ossetia we would like to inform you of the following. We have already stated that on the night of 7 to 8 August, that is, literally on the eve of the solemn opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing, precisely at the time that the leaders of most countries were in the Chinese capital in order to participate in this solemn ceremony, Georgia unleashed aggression against the people of South Ossetia, against its own territory. This occurred a few hours after the reading of an agreement on holding negotiations to reduce tension in the conflict zone, as Mr. Saakashvili himself publicly stated. These statements and assurances proved false. Despite the diplomatic efforts undertaken in contacts between Moscow, Tskhinvali and Washington and other interested capitals, including Berlin, Paris and Brussels, and despite our repeated warnings, the Georgian leadership preferred to put into effect the worst of the possible scenarios, the use of force, and thus deliberately to engage in aggression and gross violations of the rules of international law and international humanitarian law.

Two days ago the President of Russia, President Medvedev, made an important statement on the completion of the operation in South Ossetia. The aim of the operation has been achieved. The security of Russian peacekeepers, the civilian population and civilian facilities in South Ossetia has been assured. The aggressor has been punished and suffered serious losses. During the armed conflict with Georgia the Russian forces strictly observed the rules of international humanitarian law and in particular did not carry out any attacks against civilian facilities or civilians.

(Mr. Loschinin, Russian Federation)

We would like to inform you that during the visit to Moscow of Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, acting in his capacity as the President of the European Union, the Presidents of Russia and France agreed late on 12 August on the following six principles for settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. I will quote these principles because there have been misrepresentations of them by Tbilisi. I will quote them as they were agreed in Moscow. First, no use of force; second, definitive cessation of all hostilities; third, free access to humanitarian assistance; fourth, withdrawal of Georgian armed forces to their permanent positions; fifth, withdrawal of the armed forces of the Russian Federation to where they were prior to the beginning of hostilities. Pending the creation of international mechanisms, taking by the Russian peacekeeping forces of additional security measures; sixth, the beginning of international discussions on ensuring lasting security in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This Russian-French agreement is addressed to the parties to the conflict, who are Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Presidents of Russia and France support these principles and have called on the parties to the conflict to sign on to these principles. The most important principle, I would like to stress, is to refrain from the use of force, and this principle, like the others, of course still needs to be formally set down in legally binding documents. We would like to stress our great appreciation of the role played by President Nicolas Sarkozy as the leader of France and as the President of the European Union.

I should like to repeat that everything that has happened in South Ossetia over the past few days is nothing other than a carefully planned aggression by Tbilisi against the people of South Ossetia. Georgia brought a great deal of heavy military equipment into the conflict zone, used scorched earth tactics and barbarously bombed residential areas of Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, as well as peaceful South Ossetian villages, using all types of weapons. Use was made of "Grad" rocket launchers, which do not strike point target, but areas. And we have all seen on our television screens how, in what fashion these devices literally wiped the famous clean and green city of Tskhinvali from the face of the earth. The total number of fatalities among the civilian population of South Ossetia as a result of these barbaric attacks is 2,000. Two thousand - that is more than 5 per cent of the remaining population in Ossetia. The population of South Ossetia has fled to North Ossetia and other areas, so leaving their homes, their destroyed cities and villages. What is this? It is, of course, ethnic cleansing of the very first water. It is a crime against humanity. It is a war crime.

The aim of this policy was to cleanse South Ossetia of Ossetians, to annex the territory thus cleared and so to consider that the conflict with South Ossetia had been settled. Such criminal actions fall under the definition of genocide. There is considerable evidence of violations of the rules of international humanitarian law by the Georgian side. Documents will shortly be provided that confirm this criminal activity by the Georgian militarists.

There have recently been reports that Georgia has filed a suit against Russia with the International Court. That is hypocrisy and Pharisaism of the highest order. But what is one to do? Regrettably, as the events in South Ossetia have borne out, there have more than once been situations of this kind before. The present Georgian leadership has not distinguished itself by appropriate decisions, by appropriate actions or by an appropriate reaction. And if it is a matter

(Mr. Loschinin, Russian Federation)

of going to the International Court, then Georgia needs to go there, not with a complaint, but with an admission of guilt, it needs to go to the Court and ask for forgiveness from the international community and then I would recommend that it go to a temple, to a church and pray for forgiveness for its sins and light candles for the benefit of its own health.

It has been claimed that Russia made excessive use of force and should spare a small, democratic country. We have spared it. In the truest sense of the term. We have worked out the six principles with President Sarkozy, thereby manifesting our good political will and our friendly attitude towards the Georgian people.

Lessons should be drawn from this tragedy, including as regards the work of our body, the Conference on Disarmament. Two days ago, speaking during the informal meeting on item 7 of the Conference's agenda, "Transparency in armaments", I drew colleagues' attention to the fact that the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms convincingly showed Georgia's consistent preparation for the commencement of hostilities. Thus, in the period from 2003 to 2008, according to the data in the Register, which, of course, do not cover all deliveries, but only those voluntarily declared and communicated, Georgia took delivery of 124 heavy tanks, 83 large calibre artillery systems, 47 military armoured vehicles and 20 military aircraft. Even according to official data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI, during the period of Mr. Saakashvili's leadership Georgia's military expenditure has increased tenfold. According to other data, the Georgian military budget has risen twenty-fold. It is obvious that the real figures, both for the delivery of weapons and for military expenditure, are significantly higher. It is clear that the destabilizing accumulation of weapons in Georgia is the result of the connivance of a number of countries and this in the final analysis led to the bloodshed.

Yesterday there was a meeting of European Union foreign ministers in Brussels and there arose in particular the question who was guilty, and it was stated that even now it is hard to answer that question. That is worth noting. I would venture to say to you that if there were even the slightest pretext for saying Russia was guilty, that would have been done instantly, particularly against the background of the campaign of lies and slander against Russia. Instead, the Prime Minister of Slovakia, for example, has said directly that it is Georgia that is guilty of all this. The honest assessments of Eduard Shevardnadze, the former President of Georgia, whom Saakashvili, his pupil, swept aside in the anti-democratic Rose Revolution, are deserving of respect. This is what Mr. Shevardnadze said - he spoke about this yesterday; he called, and I am quoting "the Georgian intervention in South Ossetia a fatal error". I repeat, "a fatal error". Yes, it was Shevardnadze who said this. But it turns out, not only we, but also the United States of America warned Saakashvili against stupidity and fatal errors. Today, for example, it says in the International Herald Tribune, and I am quoting, (continued in English) "During a private dinner on July 9," (continued in Russian) a mere month ago, (continued in English) "[Condoleezza] Rice's aides say she warned President Saakashvili of Georgia not to get into a military conflict with Russia that Georgia could not win. She told him, in no uncertain terms, that he had to put a non-use-of-force pledge on the table". (continued in Russian) Unfortunately, these sensible appeals went unheeded by the Georgian leadership, which made the fatal error of engaging in ethnic cleansing, of committing war crimes, and it therefore bears full responsibility for everything that has happened in South Ossetia.

The PRESIDENT: There are no more speakers on the list. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case.

As the presidency of the United States comes to an end, I would like to take the opportunity to make some concluding remarks.

It has been a privilege to serve as the President of this Conference through these past months. The active participation of delegations in our meetings, and in particular in the renewed round of informal meetings under our very able coordinators, has been welcome. The informal discussions in particular have helped refresh our conversation on the important issues before us, and will aid in drawing our collective conclusions on the work of the Conference this year.

It is with regret that I must note that the enhanced exchanges of views afforded by our informal meetings have, so far, failed to reach the third and, I believe, most important of their aims, to reach consensus on our programme of work. This is all the more perplexing as our discussions underscored the common understanding of the CD's purpose, and the importance of substantive work on our four core issues, including the prompt commencement of negotiations on an FMCT. National statements in the plenary sessions in recent weeks have continued to show strong support for the programme of work proposed by the Presidency, CD/1840, and I wish to acknowledge the strong basis for that proposal in the efforts of the 2006 and 2007 presidencies.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, his deputy and the entire secretariat for their unfailing support to us during our time as President, and express especial gratitude to the interpreters for their unstinting efforts.

After our meeting today, I will be yielding the Chair to our Venezuelan colleagues, and I would like to welcome Ambassador Mundaraín Hernández to the Conference on Disarmament and assure him of our full support and, I am certain, that of the entire P-6 group of Presidents, in carrying out his duties. Under his leadership, we look forward to agreement on a strong and substantive report of the Conference's work this year to the United Nations General Assembly.

This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference, under the presidency of Venezuela, will be held on Tuesday, 19 August, at 10 o'clock in this chamber.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.