

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 9 September 2008, at 11 a.m.

President: Mr. Germán MUNDARAÍN HERNÁNDEZ (Venezuela)

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I declare open the 1117th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Before proceeding to the adoption of the report of the Conference for this year, I would take this opportunity to say goodbye on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf to our distinguished colleague Ambassador Masood Khan, who has been appointed representative of his country, Pakistan, to the People's Republic of China. On behalf of the Conference and, I repeat, on my own behalf I would like to express to Ambassador Khan, the members of his delegation and the plenary our deep appreciation for his many and very helpful contributions to our activities during his term of office. We wish him every success and satisfaction in his new responsibilities. Best wishes, Ambassador.

I am also honoured and pleased to welcome to Geneva Ambassador Himanen of Finland, Ambassador Giovanni Manfredi of Italy and Ambassador Chang Dong-hee of the Republic of Korea, who are with us at this meeting. I take this opportunity to convey to Messrs. Himanen, Manfredi and Chang Dong-hee the readiness of us all to cooperate with them and to give them every assistance and support in the performance of their duties. I have just been informed that I omitted someone from the expressions of welcome. That is Ambassador Christian Strohal of Austria, whom we welcome and who is with us today. We wish him equal success in his new duties and assure him of our readiness to cooperate for the most effective possible discharge of his high responsibilities.

I would now like to invite you to officialize the agreement reached provisionally in the informal plenary as regards the draft annual report which is contained in document CD/WP.550 and CD/550 Amendment 1, which you all have. In document CD/WP.550 Amendment 1, we have the paragraphs that were substantively amended last week. The Secretariat has also taken note of the editorial corrections, document number, names and titles of delegates and representatives and other details and will correct the final document accordingly. Also, in keeping with what took place this morning we have adopted the presidential proposal concerning paragraphs 37 and 38 together with the comments made by the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran; to sum up, the word "progress" changes to "results". We also accepted the suggestion made by the representative of South Africa. In connection with the proposal made by the delegate of Iran, paragraphs 37, 38, 43, 45, 47, 49 and 51 are amended in the way that I have already mentioned, by the replacement of the word "progress" by "results". May I take it that the report as a whole is adopted? I hear no comments; that appears to be the case.

I would now like to turn to the list of speakers who wish to take the floor today. We will begin with the representative of Finland, Ambassador Hannu Himanen. You have the floor Ambassador.

Mr. HIMANEN (Finland): Mr. President, first of all let me congratulate you on the able guidance of the proceedings of this Conference, which has just led to the successful adoption of our report to the General Assembly. I would also wish to thank you very much for your words of welcome to me and a number of other new colleagues in this hall, and I would wish to beg your indulgence to make a couple of introductory remarks.

(Mr. Himanen, Finland)

In today's world, peace and security must be addressed from a global perspective. We need a multilateral security system that is based on cooperation. For that simple reason, Finland is a strong supporter and advocate of effective multilateralism. I take pleasure in pledging Finland's full and continued support to the Conference on Disarmament, which serves as the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The Conference can justifiably be proud of having managed to create international norms on disarmament. The Chemical Weapons Convention, the first international legal instrument to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction in a verifiable manner, was successfully negotiated by this Conference. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was also finalized at this Conference. The adherence of all States to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is vital, and Finland continues to urge all those States that have not yet ratified the CTBT to do so as soon as possible.

The Chemical Weapons Convention and the CTBT are indeed laudable achievements. Unfortunately, for the past decade the Conference has done little but, if you allow me to say so, rest on its laurels. This immobility is a source of growing concern and frustration for countries such as Finland which believe in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

We must avoid the danger that this Conference sinks into irrelevance. It would prompt States increasingly to turn to other ways of negotiating international disarmament instruments. That is not, we believe, in anyone's true interest.

We are, however, encouraged by the draft proposal for a programme of work, presented by the P6 and contained in document CD/1840. It is a balanced and well-crafted compromise that would allow this Conference to resume productive work and serious negotiations. In substance, we are encouraged by the interactive informal thematic debates during the 2008 annual session.

We believe that the time is ripe for the Conference to redeem itself by engaging finally and in earnest in the delayed fissile material cut-off treaty negotiations for which the CD is the most natural forum, thanks to its composition and expertise. The proposed programme of work would allow us to start substantive discussions on three other issues: nuclear disarmament, prevention of an arms race in outer space and negative security assurances, which are of no lesser importance.

Let me conclude by urging all Conference members to join in the emerging consensus on this programme of work and move forward in a spirit of constructive engagement. This would also set the scene for restoring the Conference's role in the multilateral disarmament architecture.

Let me in conclusion assure you, in my personal capacity and on behalf of my delegation, of our full cooperation with you, Mr. President, and all the delegations around the table, to bring about meaningful results in the work ahead for the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank Ambassador Hannu Himanen of Finland for his comments and for his significant contributions to this forum. Continuing with the list of speakers, I call on the Ambassador of Pakistan, Ambassador Masood Khan.

Mr. KHAN (Pakistan): Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament will conclude its 2008 session on 12 September. Today, we have formally adopted the annual report of the Conference to the United Nations General Assembly. The discussions and negotiations on the draft report have been brisk, transparent and productive. You deserve full credit for that. We commend you for steering this process in an effective and efficient manner. We acknowledge the contribution of your talented delegation and admire them for their diplomatic skills.

Pakistan's position on CD/1840 has been reflected in CD/1851, which has been submitted as an official document of the Conference. We understand that that document (CD/1851) has been reflected in the report we have adopted today.

In this last phase of consultations, I want to thank Ambassador Christina Rocca of the United States, Ambassador Idriss Jazaïry of Algeria and the delegations of Iran, Canada, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, South Africa and the United Kingdom for their efforts to build consensus. I would especially thank Ambassador Wang Qun for his constructive and forward-looking approach. I will be remiss if I do not mention the steadfast and resolute advocacy of Ambassador Johannes Landman for a breakthrough in the CD.

I came to Geneva as Permanent Representative of Pakistan on 14 March 2005 and addressed the Conference for the first time on 23 March. Since then, I have worked closely with my colleagues on the CD agenda. I also had the privilege of presiding over the CD in mid-2005 from 11 July to 26 August. I will leave Geneva soon to serve Pakistan in another capacity.

As I read out these valedictory remarks, let me underline that I do not pretend to have a better vision for the CD. I have no silver bullet. I know not of a panacea that can fix the CD's problems. The impasse in the CD is because of divergences in the national security interests of CD members as perceived at the highest levels of decision-making. The CD itself is not to be faulted, because all delegations come here to work hard and produce results. Negotiations on the four core issues have been eluding us because of the shifting priorities of the most influential actors in the CD.

It may sound strange but the CD is not all about CD. It is a hub, a fulcrum for all disarmament-related activities in Geneva and beyond within the United Nations system. CD delegations, buttressed of course by expertise from capitals, support the BWC and CCW regimes. The CD delegations influence and shape decisions in the First Committee of the General Assembly. Therefore, despite the absence of negotiations in the CD, this forum has performed the role of an active catalyst. That said, I agree that we do not need surrogates; we need the real thing.

(Mr. Khan, Pakistan)

Wherever consensus has eluded us, the stakes have been too high, national security interests too sensitive. Consensus-building is a difficult exercise but it is not an impossible task. Diplomats have the skills to craft consensus, even in situations which appear to be intractable. But to reach consensus, their instinct must tell them that a particular issue is amenable to compromise.

I want to thank all my colleagues for their camaraderie, their collegiality and their support to me in different settings. I cannot take their names one by one, because then I would be selective. But I want to thank all of you for your unfailing courtesy and empathy. I have met some of the best minds here in this CD. I have met some of the most accomplished professionals in the CD. I have had the privilege of meeting some of the best human beings in the CD. As I move on, I shall cherish my association with all of you here and with the CD.

I also take this opportunity to thank Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Secretary-General of the CD, and Ambassador Tim Caughley, Deputy Secretary-General of the CD and Director of the Office of Disarmament Affairs, who lead an efficient Secretariat. The Secretariat has serviced the Conference most ably and creditably. Even in the so-called lean period, we have made the Secretariat work very hard. They have kept their powder dry for the hard times. I thank all of them. And I thank the interpreters, who, week after week, have been trying to make sense out of what we say here.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan, Ambassador Masood Khan for his comments. Next, the representative of Viet Nam, Mr. Pham Quoc Tru, has the floor.

Mr. PHAM (Viet Nam): Mr. President, please allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to express our sincere thanks and congratulations to you upon your assumption of the presidency of the Conference. My delegation highly appreciates your hard work and your tireless efforts made in the process of consultations with delegations in order to draft and adopt the report of our Conference to the United Nations General Assembly. I would also like to thank the other Presidents of the Conference during the year 2008, the Ambassadors of Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, who have made great and concerted efforts for the work of our Conference.

It is a great honour for Viet Nam to be the first CD President for 2009. May I take this opportunity to express the total determination of my delegation to conduct consultations during the intersessional period with all the member States of the Conference with a view to taking helpful steps to start the work of the Conference next year. This task will obviously be facilitated by smooth cooperation among all, particularly the Presidents for the 2008 CD session and the Presidents for the 2009 CD session. My delegation will listen to all colleagues so as to ensure the best possible conditions for the success of the Conference in 2009. The success of the 2009 CD session is subject to the common efforts of all members of the Conference. Therefore, may I appeal to all delegations to approach the 2009 CD session with an open mind and with a spirit of compromise, flexibility and renewed determination that will allow the Conference to get back to substantive work.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank the representative of Viet Nam for his comments. To continue with our list of speakers I now give the floor to Ambassador Eric Danon, Permanent Representative of France. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. DANON (France) (spoke in French): Thank you Mr. President. I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the stabilization and association process countries and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, and in addition Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan align themselves with this statement. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank the six Presidencies of 2008 for the constructive work that has been accomplished this year under their mandate. My thanks go also to the seven coordinators who enabled us to carry out informal discussions on the topics on the agenda of the Conference.

The European Union would like to stress the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral forum available to the international community for negotiations at the global level in the area of disarmament. The European Union has constantly striven for the adoption of a work programme of the Conference on Disarmament and will spare no effort to revitalize this unique forum so that it can resume negotiations and substantive work.

The European Union is encouraged by the informal discussions that have taken place during the 2008 session of the Conference on Disarmament, in which it participated actively. It welcomes the momentum achieved by the Conference since the platform of the six Presidencies (the P6) was established at the start of 2006 and the continuation of that approach by the P6 in 2007 and 2008. This momentum led on 13 March 2008 to a proposal by the six Presidents of 2008 for a programme of work of the Conference (contained in document CD/1840).

The European Union has said that it could accept that proposal as it stands. The European Union attaches clear priority to the negotiation without preconditions of a non-discriminatory multilateral treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices, a subject which it believes is the most ripe for the beginning of negotiations. The European Union is also ready to participate in substantive discussions on the other subjects mentioned in CD/1840: nuclear disarmament and the prevention of nuclear war; issues related to prevention of the arms race in outer space and appropriate arrangements to assure non-nuclear weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as other subjects connected with the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. The European Union considers document CD/1840 as a compromise text which reflects concessions made by all parties.

This compromise, in comparison to documents L.1, CRP.5 and CRP.6 which were proposed last year as a basis for the adoption of a programme of work, includes additional elements granted to countries that had difficulties with those proposals. In agreeing to support this text the European Union has once again demonstrated its goodwill and its determination to break the deadlock. It is now high time for everyone to show flexibility and responsibility and join in the consensus so that we can at last begin substantive work in this forum.

(Mr. Danon, France)

The system of the presidential platform which was adopted in 2006 and successfully continued in 2007 and 2008 has enabled us to make progress. We would like to encourage the Presidents of 2009 to use this system again and to ensure that consultations are held on the contents of proposal CD/1840 concerning a programme of work that provides the Conference with a real possibility of resuming its negotiating role.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the continued enlargement of the Conference, in particular to include the States members of the European Union that are not yet members of the Conference.

Mr. President, this year you did excellent work related to the preparation of our annual report to the General Assembly and we would like to thank you for that. We consider that the report of the Conference to the General Assembly should truly reflect the determination of the Conference to preserve its potential as a negotiating forum so that that potential can be realized in the near future. The European Union is nonetheless ready to agree to the adoption of this report inasmuch as it reflects the reality of the discussions held this year.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank Ambassador Eric Danon, who spoke on behalf of the European Union. The next speaker is the Ambassador of Switzerland, Ambassador Jürg Streuli. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. STREULI (Switzerland): Mr. President, let me first thank you, and all the previous 2008 Presidents, for their tireless efforts towards our common goal of adopting a work programme this year. We also appreciate the efforts by the seven coordinators who led out substantive discussions over the year.

You have guided us through difficult waters towards the adoption of the CD report. While the draft report, in our view, could be more forward-looking and more ambitious, we did support your efforts on finding a consensus. We could go along with the compromise language presented at the end of last week and believe the adopted text factually reflects what happened in this chamber after the six Presidents were forced to acknowledge that the Conference would not arrive at a consensus on the programme of work this year.

I would like to support the statement made by Norway on 27 September. The Norwegian delegation called for a number of reforms of the CD so that we can work more efficiently. They also called for more creative approaches on moving forward and explored the possibility of incorporating civil society, which has in other processes played such an active and positive role. I would especially agree that we should seriously reflect on the rules of procedure and the way that consensus principle can be used to hamper progress on procedural matters. Indeed, a cynic would say that the consensus principle is the most efficient tool in this room, as it has single-handedly blocked us from doing what we are here to do, namely to negotiate.

So, was 2008 a lost year? In absolute terms: maybe yes. We have wasted time we could have used to negotiate a ban on the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. We have wasted time we could have used on the other core agenda issues. And we have wasted time we

(Mr. Streuli, Switzerland)

could have used to tackle additional disarmament and non-proliferation challenges. But despite this, we did not move backward. We are now approaching the end of a year which brought us a small but important step forward. And crucially, at the beginning of 2009, there will be a strong and solid base from which to start our work.

A draft programme of work will be on the table next year, and it will hopefully receive even more support than this year. Document CD/1840 is the way forward and remains the best possible compromise to start our work. It builds on the approach of last year and elegantly combines the earlier documents which brought us so close to a breakthrough. Next year, we do not start from scratch, but can build on the logic of CD/1840. And once more, there is room for hope that next year is a year of change, change which can bring us back on the right track.

The right track, in view of my delegation, is to initiate negotiations without preconditions on an FMCT. For a very long time now, Switzerland has stated that we see such a treaty as an essential third pillar to complement the existing nuclear regime. An FMCT, which under the purposed programme of work could be negotiated without any preconditions regarding scope and verification, should serve both disarmament and non-proliferation purposes. And this year's consultation, under the able guidance of Ambassador Tarui of Japan, showed that it is the clear priority for most delegations.

Let me briefly say a few words about one of the most positive developments in the CD over the last few years: I am referring to the cooperation between the six Presidents. The so-called P6 platform, which has now been used for three consecutive years, has again proved to be an efficient instrument for coherently and successfully steering this body over the year. I strongly believe that if we want to break the deadlock in the coming years, we would be well advised to build on the P6 mechanism, together with the appointment of coordinators for the seven items on the agenda. We are sure that the incoming Presidents of 2009 will welcome cooperating in this spirit, and Switzerland, as one of the six Presidents last year, would certainly encourage them to do so.

Finally, Mr. President, let me thank you personally and the entire team of the Venezuelan Mission for all your hard work. Your task is of course not yet finished. After the adoption of the report just now here in the CD and the resolution in the First Committee in New York, you will be needed to facilitate the transition to the first President of 2009. We wish you success in these final tasks of your presidency.

And finally, my best wishes go to our friend, Masood Khan. We are certainly losing, in him in Geneva, one of the most brilliant diplomats and negotiators. Even if I have not always agreed with his positions, I have appreciated his fairness and his transparency, and really regret his departure.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank Ambassador Streuli, for his kind words to the Chair and to the delegation of Venezuela. I thank him too for the proposals that he has made, which improve the vision of the Conference. To continue with our speakers for today, I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia, Mr. Ávila Camacho. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. ÁVILA COMACHO (Colombia) (spoke in Spanish): Mr. President, as this is my first time to take the floor in a plenary formal meeting under your presidency, may I express my most sincere pleasure at seeing you presiding on behalf of the sister Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela over the work of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our full support for its successful conclusion. May I also on behalf of my delegation welcome the distinguished representatives of Austria, South Korea, Finland, France and Italy on their appointment to this city and assure them of the Colombian Mission's full support in their work.

My delegation also wishes every personal and professional success to the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan, Ambassador Masood Khan, as he takes up his new functions. We thank him for and appreciate his important contributions to this forum.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent work done, too, by all the Presidents of the Conference this year, which made it possible to move forward, sparing no effort, in taking the steps necessary to find possible formulations that would lead to the adoption of a programme of work. We also acknowledge the important and painstaking work done by the coordinators, who provided a helpful and necessary opportunity for discussion of the issues.

We have come to the time in the year when we have to adopt, and indeed have adopted just before my statement, the report that the Conference will submit to the United Nations General Assembly at its next session. This might be an appropriate moment to reflect on our intentions and activities and to some extent renew our spirit of cooperation so as to create opportunities for dialogue and understanding of the situation that we are now experiencing. However, it is not just a matter of creating windows of opportunities. It is also a matter of seizing these opportunities and putting them to use.

As far as my delegation is concerned, there have been more than enough words. We need to put those words into action. We need greater political will, we need the Conference on Disarmament to overcome the terminal crisis it is going through and in some way, above all, achieve the adoption of a programme of work. My delegation is of the view that the proposal presented by the six Presidents contained in document CD/1840 is a solid base that can serve for the continuation of work next year. Many efforts have been made by the Presidents to highlight it as a valid option. We also think that this proposal provides continuity to the work of the Conference and an opportunity to move forward in building a possible consensus.

Lastly, Mr. President, may I underscore the efficient and excellent manner in which you and your delegation have dealt with the drafting and presentation of the report of the Conference through open and inclusive consultations and, in particular, transparency. As is well known, Colombia supports the adoption of the report and thanks to your tremendous efforts it reflects factually what happened in this forum during this year.

Mr. President, may I assure you that my delegation will continue to contribute in the best possible way to the further work of the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you Sir.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank Mr. Ávila, representative of Colombia, for his generosity in assessing the work done by Venezuela. Continuing with the list of speakers, I give the floor to the delegation of the Republic of Argentina.

Mr. PELÁEZ (Argentina) (spoke in Spanish): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation wishes to take the floor at this last formal meeting of the Conference on Disarmament to thank you for all the work you have done to achieve adoption of the report of the Conference on Disarmament to the United Nations General Assembly. As a Latin American State we are proud to have witnessed the leadership and determination shown by the delegation of Venezuela during their conduct of our work in the past two weeks.

The basis for negotiation put to us was an excellent reflection of the progress made in this forum during 2008 aimed at fostering substantive discussion of the seven items on the agenda. The subsequent amendments to the text are a reflection of the spirit of compromise and flexibility of most of the States members of the Conference. We think that both elements can continue to spearhead our work during the 2009 session.

Permit me too, through you, to congratulate the six Presidents of the Conference on Disarmament for the excellent work they have done throughout the year with a view to the adoption of a programme of work on the basis of document CD/1840, elements of which have been supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of my country on 12 March and repeatedly in statements made at the regional level.

During 2009 Argentina will hold the presidency of the Conference and we are keen to build on the basis of the progress made this year and in previous sessions of the Conference. In other words, we will spare no effort to ensure that the foundations continue to be laid for the early adoption of the programme of work and to restore, after more than a decade, the United Nations sole negotiating forum for disarmament issues.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank Ambassador Peláez for his generous comments. Continuing with our speakers. I now call on the Ambassador of Zimbabwe, Ambassador Chipaziwa. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. CHIPAZIWA (Zimbabwe): Mr. President, I wish to commend you and your team for your exemplary work in facilitating the work of the Conference on Disarmament in 2008. We of the Group of 21 are particularly indebted to you and your team for the generous energy and diplomatic skills you deployed to ensure that the Conference's annual report to the General Assembly is adopted. As we conclude the 2008 session of the Conference, our Group further puts on record its appreciation for the tremendous work done by your predecessors in the presidency, the distinguished Ambassadors of Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

On a more personal note, may I take this opportunity to bid farewell to the distinguished colleague and dear friend, Ambassador Masood Khan of Pakistan. I wish him the best in his future endeavours. Equally, I also welcome the new colleagues whose names have been read out to us.

(Mr. Chipaziwa, Zimbabwe)

Also, we wish to note and express our gratitude to the secretariat under the leadership of Mr. Ordzhonikidze for its excellent services and guidance during 2008.

Finally, I may say how much the Group of 21 looks forward to a fruitful 2009 session of the Conference on Disarmament. We remain ready to make our steady contribution to the success of the Conference on Disarmament in the coming year.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Zimbabwe for his comments and for his contribution. To continue with our list of speakers, I call on Ambassador Wang Qun of the People's Republic of China. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. WANG Qun (China) (spoke in Chinese): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, we have just adopted this year's annual report. I commend you for the efforts you have made during your presidency to move the work of the Conference on Disarmament forward, especially your unremitting efforts to reach agreement on this report. This brings the work of the Conference for this year to a successful conclusion. We note that under your wise and farsighted guidance all member States have engaged in open, transparent and frank discussions on the draft annual report, with many countries submitting constructive proposals for revision. What we have achieved is not merely the adoption of this year's annual report; what is more important is the fact that through this process all parties have gained a more objective, clearer understanding of the current situation in the Conference and have made a realistic assessment of the work of the Conference. This has also laid a good foundation for next year's work. Moreover, we are also quite pleased by the spirit of friendly consultation and compromise displayed by all parties. We hope that the Conference's work next year will, as the distinguished Ambassador of Switzerland anticipates, continue moving in a harmonious atmosphere towards reaching consensus on a programme of work as soon as possible and proceeding with our substantive work.

I should like to take this opportunity to welcome the distinguished Ambassadors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, France, the Republic of Korea, Finland, Italy and Austria, and to express the hope that they may bring wisdom and vigour to the work of the Conference. I also wish them every success in their work.

I should also like to take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt respect to the outgoing distinguished Permanent Representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Masood Khan. Ambassador Khan has outstanding diplomatic skills, keen insight and a sincere and frank character. During his tenure, he has been very active in the world of multilateral diplomacy in Geneva and has contributed in a major way to the success of many conferences, winning wide praise. In the field of multilateral arms control and disarmament he has tirelessly endeavoured to bridge the differences between parties and always sought actively to foster consensus with a view to reaching agreement on a programme of work for the Conference that is acceptable to all. As an Ambassador for disarmament, I am deeply sorry that he is leaving us, yet at the same time I am delighted that he will be assuming the post of Pakistan's Ambassador to the People's Republic of China. On the occasion of his departure, I should like, together with all

(Mr Wang Qun, China)

colleagues here present, to express my special thanks to Ambassador Khan for his outstanding contributions to multilateral diplomacy, including the work of the Conference on Disarmament. I extend to him all best wishes as he takes up his new post; we wish him every success and further accomplishments.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Spanish): I thank Ambassador Wang Qun of the People's Republic of China for his comments.

I have no further speakers on my list. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? That does not appear to be the case.

Before adjourning the official meeting, permit me to make some concluding comments on our work which is coming to an end today. It is customary in this type of activities to make a speech. What I am going to do is to give you my regards because this is a time for satisfaction, a time to round off an effort, an opportunity for expressing appreciation and thanks, especially when the effort is a group one. My heartfelt thanks to you all. Especially to the P6, who gave me all sorts of cooperation and put their experience at the service of this office; to the seven coordinators, whose substantive contributions provided support for the Conference: to the regional coordinators, who served as links with the various groups; to Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, with his authority, his always timely words and his concern for the progress of the Conference; to the secretariat, to the entire Secretariat, particularly Mr. Tim Caughley, who put his wealth of knowledge at the service of consensus; to the young conference room officers, to the interpreters and translators, and to all delegations - thank you on behalf of the delegation of Venezuela.

I have listened carefully to the statements made here in this room today. Some of them were very conceptual, some of them very generous, some expressed a great deal of satisfaction, and all were very generous to us and this encourages us to continue our work, that of facilitating consensus in this forum. When we assumed this responsibility one of our first tasks was to determine the nature of this place which, we said in our opening statement, is a diverse and pluralistic forum. I imagine that for many years it will be diverse and pluralistic, and God grant that it may always be that way, diverse and pluralistic; I, in particular, aspire to a diverse and pluralistic world.

Identifying our objectives was another of our tasks. The President of the last session has the responsibility of proposing, negotiating and obtaining the Conference's approval of the annual report for submission to the General Assembly. It was also important to determine our style. As you are aware, in the diplomatic world form is as important as substance, a form that will generate trust. The best recipe is dialogue, a broad approach, a lot of consultations, a lot of inclusion of everybody, a lot of transparency and, above all, something that has always been a constant requirement: flexibility. And we acted accordingly out of conviction that this was our task and the obligation of everyone present here: it is a question of strengthening the international legal order regarding arms control. That is why we do it and we do it too to contribute to international peace and security.

Today the main task entrusted to us comes to an end. I cannot fail to join others in expressing my concern, a concern present in many of the statements that we have heard today

(The President)

and present during the Conference too as a major concern: it is essential that we settle on a programme of work. I earnestly hope that in 2009, with greater efforts even than this year, we will be able to achieve that goal. I wish to say that occupying this office has helped me, has helped the entire delegation of Venezuela to acquire some modest experience that we place as of now at the service of the next President. I would like to pass on what was passed on to us, not just out of reciprocity, but because I believe that the objective of the Conference requires it.

I would like to conclude by speaking not about disarmament issues but about the human qualities of those present here and of what I was able to appreciate in the many meetings for formal and informal consultations. I got to know a large number of representatives of countries and I must acknowledge their great humanity, their sincerity, their spirit of camaraderie and the support that they gave me. All of that has made me a very happy person. Thank you very much.

As there are no further speakers I think that I should declare our activities for today concluded.

The meeting rose at 12 noon.