

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 3 September 2002, at 10.20 a.m.

President:

Mr. András Szabó

(Hungary)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 913th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I should like to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference, to the participants in the 2002 United Nations Disarmament Fellowship and Training Programme who are observing the proceedings of this plenary. I am sure they will benefit from exposure to our forum, and especially from the presentations that will be made to them on various aspects of our work. I wish them a fruitful stay in Geneva.

Today I have five names on my list of speakers. First of all, I give the floor to the representative of Spain, Ambassador Miranda.

Mr. MIRANDA (Spain) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, as I am taking the floor for the first time during your presidency please allow me at the outset to congratulate you on this important responsibility, while at the same time wishing you every success in your endeavours. I also wish to assure you that you can rely on the cooperation and support of my delegation.

At last Thursday's plenary meeting, Ambassador Dembri, Ambassador Lint, Ambassador Reyes, Ambassador Salander and Ambassador Vega introduced a proposal for a programme of work of the Conference. This text is very balanced in its content and its good intentions are undoubtedly in keeping with the personal and professional qualities of the five ambassadors who drafted it. I wish to confirm to you, Mr. President, and through you to all the member States of this honourable and important Conference, that my country could accept this proposal.

At the beginning of this year the Conference on Disarmament reaffirmed its support for document CD/1624 as a basis for intensifying its consultations. The initiative of these five ambassadors, whose countries belong to different regional groups, is an extremely timely effort to ensure that this Conference can start its substantive work 2003. Without any doubt the consultations that you yourself and the incoming president of the Conference, Ambassador Sood, will hold during the intersessional period will be of great importance in formalizing, if possible in January 2003, the agreement that we need and that we should all hope to achieve.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Spain for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker on my list is Ambassador Faessler, the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. FAESSLER (Switzerland) (translated from French): Mr. President, I should like to start by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency and by assuring you of the full support of my delegation in the performance of your duties.

(Mr. Faessler, Switzerland)

At the last meeting of the Conference on Disarmament a group of five ambassadors presented a draft programme of work for the Conference, covering all the points included in the Decalogue. This draft, which was born of a personal initiative of the five ambassadors, is the fruit of consultations with the members of the Conference. I should like to express my gratitude for the exemplary undertaking by these ambassadors in their attempt to break the deadlock in the Conference and I would also like to reaffirm my delegation's full support for their efforts.

The draft that we have before us is currently the most realistic and constructive approach to the adoption of a programme of work. I would note, in particular, the fact that it comes from a group of colleagues representing very diverse groups - a "cross group" initiative - and the fact that it is of an evolving nature. Given this evolving quality, I should also like to assure the present and future presidents of the Conference that you will be able to count on the full and active support of the Swiss delegation during the consultations to be held during the intersessional period. I should add that it is important for all countries to be closely associated with these consultations.

Notwithstanding the very praiseworthy activities undertaken on all sides, we are forced to concede that, at the end of the 2002 session, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable, for the fourth consecutive year, to adopt a programme of work. This deplorable situation is a reflection of the very close relationship between our work and the international political environment. The external factors which underlie our difficulties go far beyond any procedural and institutional capacities that we may have to start and complete our work. But our Conference has also fallen victim to a certain lack of confidence by the most powerful States, relating in particular to the efficacy of the multilateral disarmament measures which remain essential for smaller countries such as my own.

In order to reaffirm the usefulness of the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, it is essential that we try to move beyond well-trodden paths and explore new approaches. The draft by the five ambassadors does afford us precisely this type of possibility and I should like to appeal to all members of the Conference on Disarmament to draw on the realistic and constructive nature of this draft and show the flexibility necessary for the adoption of a programme of work.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Switzerland for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker on my list is Ambassador Westdal of Canada.

Mr. WESTDAL (Canada): First allow me to congratulate you, Ambassador Szabó, on your performance as our President. I believe that you are serving us very well and my compliments go to you and your team.

I take the floor briefly to express Canada's respect and support for the contribution to our work of the five ambassadors Dembri, Lint, Reyes, Salander and Vega. Their paper has reanimated our drive for consensus on a work programme. Its diverse, cross-group, consultative origins are a very sound base. Its text on PAROS is usefully imaginative.

(Mr. Westdal, Canada)

We think that, with this paper, agreement on a work programme is clearly within our reach and we urge those parties still unable to agree to strive to reconcile their differences, which do not look all that great to us - and to strive to do that soon - and let us get back to work here.

We all know that there is much at stake, including the very future of this vital institution and its unique role in multilateral non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. And it is in this broader context that I particularly commend the timely initiative of our five colleagues.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Westdal for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to Ambassador Caughley of New Zealand.

Mr. CAUGHLEY (New Zealand): Mr. President, as my delegation reflects on this year's work, it strikes me from the vantage point of one who is new to the Conference on Disarmament that, after quite a lot of spinning of its wheels, the Conference has in recent months developed some traction. This follows widespread dismay at the intolerable situation that this Conference was moribund in the face of very worrying and challenging international crises.

My delegation welcomes the assiduous work that you and your predecessors have contributed to our efforts throughout the year. We appreciate the willingness of our presidents to consult widely and laterally, the preparedness of presidents to put before us specific ideas and initiatives. This, we believe, responds to widespread insistence on the need for progress towards finding an acceptable programme of work.

We have also been particularly encouraged in recent weeks by the further impetus which the five ambassadors have given to our efforts. My delegation fully supports the product of the skills and energies of the five ambassadors in building on the Amorim proposal and of their evolutionary approach to finding a solution on the work programme. We attach special significance to the fact that it all flows from a broad geographical spread and that they have consulted very widely.

Mr. President, your own efforts to date to capture in our draft report the essence of the momentum, the traction, which the Conference on Disarmament has begun to develop and which we hope will lead us to a position where we can discharge our common responsibility to the international community to get down to work at the beginning of 2003 is fully supported by the New Zealand delegation. We will continue to support your efforts and those of the incoming president to that end. Our sense is that the march towards agreement on a programme of work is inexorable. It is not a question of whether, but when.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you very much for your kind comments addressed to the Chair and to the former presidents of the Conference. My next speaker and the last speaker on my list is Ambassador Smith of Australia.

Mr. SMITH (Australia): Let me join the previous speakers this morning in congratulating you on the job you have been doing as president of this Conference and in assuring you of the continuing full support of the Australian delegation.

(Mr. Smith, Australia)

Mr. President, I can be brief because the four previous speakers today have essentially taken the words out of my mouth. In summary, therefore, we think that the effort of the five ambassadors to craft a programme of work that might allow us to recommence real work in this body is to be applauded. This text builds positively on the Amorim proposal, which our delegation and many others have been able to support and have openly supported in this body as the basis for a resumption of work. Moreover, as a cross-group initiative, it is even more solidly grounded than previous such efforts.

Australia can therefore support it as a vehicle for carrying forward consultations intersessionally so that, in the new year, it is to be hoped that we can start addressing the various elements in that programme, at the top of which, for this delegation, is a start on negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Australia for his statement and for his kind words. That concludes my list of speakers today. Does any delegation wish to speak at this stage? The representative of Austria, Mr. Kmentt, has the floor.

Mr. KMENTT (Austria): Mr. President, since this is the first time I am taking the floor under your presidency, please allow me to congratulate you also and to assure you of the full cooperation of your neighbour.

The reason that I am taking the floor today is also briefly to state our full support for the initiative of the five former presidents. We greatly appreciate this cross-group effort to get the Conference out of its current sad state of affairs. We are part of the overwhelming majority of members of the Conference who cannot accept the arguments by those who have so long prevented the Conference on Disarmament from starting work. We would like to urge everybody to use the intersessional period to do some hard thinking and to come back at the start of next year with a willingness and flexibility to agree on a programme of work.

My delegation was ready to support the Amorim proposal. We could have supported the first draft submitted by the five presidents and we can definitely support the current version of their proposal.

We would like to urge other members of the Conference to do the same.

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

As I see no other representatives who wish to take the floor, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Conference that, as provided for in rule 9 of the rules of procedure, the representatives of the following member States will preside over the Conference in 2003: India,

(The President)

from 1 January to 16 February; Indonesia, from 17 February to 16 March; the Islamic Republic of Iran, from 17 March to 25 May; Iraq, from 26 May to 22 June; Ireland, from 23 June to 17 August; and Israel, from 18 August to the end of the year, 31 December 2003.

This concludes our business for today. As I announced last week, however, we will convene an informal plenary meeting in 10 minutes' time to continue the consideration of the draft annual report. As usual, this meeting will be open only to member States of the Conference, as well as to the observer States.

The next and, it is to be hoped, the last plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 12 September, at 10 a.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.