

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and thirty-sixth plenary meeting

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President: Mr. Ravinatha Aryasinha(Sri Lanka)

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The President: I call to order the one thousand four hundred and thirty-sixth plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Excellencies, Mr. Møller, before we start our business today, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, Mr. Zbigniew Czech, Permanent Representative of Poland, who has assumed his responsibilities as representative of his Government to the Conference.

I now turn to the list of requests for States not members of this Conference who wish to participate in our work during the 2018 session. The requests received by the Conference on Disarmament secretariat by yesterday, 29 January, at 3 p.m. are contained in document CD/WP.604/Add.1, which is available on your tables. Any requests from non-member States received after the aforementioned date indicated will be presented for your consideration and decision at the next plenary meeting. May I take it that the Conference decides to invite these States to participate in our work in accordance with its rules of procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: Allow me to suspend the meeting for a brief moment in order to allow the representatives of the non-member States who have just been invited to participate in the work of the Conference to take their seats in the Council Chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Excellencies, dear colleagues, we have with us the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Michael Møller, who is attending today's session. At the commencement, I wish to give him the floor to make a statement.

Mr. Møller (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament): Thank you, Mr. President. Good morning dear colleagues, Excellencies, at the outset of your deliberations this year, I wanted, first of all, to wish you a happy new year, but, above all, to wish you a productive new year and just recommit myself, the secretariat and the Secretary-General to help you as much as we possibly can to move forward with the work of the Conference on Disarmament. I have already been engaging with the six Presidents for this session to see how we can be of assistance in moving forward and, hopefully, moving past the blockages that we have been witnessing for far too long.

Internally in the organization, as you will have noticed already, we have a different and much more engaged Secretary-General who has put disarmament at the top of his agenda. We have a new High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who has been given very clear instructions by the Secretary-General to be as helpful and imaginative as possible in trying to come up with suggestions for you to move forward. We have a new Director of the Geneva branch of the Office for Disarmament Affairs who is on the same page as I am. All of us are really at your disposal to do as much as we can to make sure that you have productive sessions this year. I look forward to working with you, as we all do, to make sure that in an increasingly fractious world we are able to move forward on a number of issues that are really urgent and find a way to overcome the blockages that have stopped our work for far too long.

I am particularly mindful of the need to address the urgent issues that are being presented to the world from the rapid evolution of technology and which, so far, by and large, has been completely unregulated. We need to find some collective agreements on how to deal with it, how to regulate it, how to inject some ethics and some order into how these different technologies are being used already and are going to be used in the future – a future that is moving unfortunately much faster than most of us are able to adapt to and the only way to do that is if we do so collectively.

So, I repeat our commitment to be of as much assistance and help as possible and I thank the President for having given me the floor.

The President: Thank you Secretary-General. Excellencies, dear colleagues, I was very encouraged last week by the support expressed for the presidency, highlighted by many of you in your interventions. Sri Lanka also fully acknowledges the importance of the early establishment of a programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament. We

believe, however, that it should evolve through an expeditious process of consultations and consensus-making.

During my bilateral consultations so far, it is evident that, despite the willingness of member States to engage on a programme of work, further efforts are required to build convergence on any of the agenda items with a view to developing a programme of work. In addition to bilateral consultations, I look forward to our informal discussion on a programme of work, which will commence at the conclusion of this formal session thereby infusing greater transparency in the process as well as facilitating greater understanding of each others' points of view.

We note that a number of sound proposals have been presented over the past years and it would be worthwhile for the Conference to revisit them. In this regard, I wish to recall that, for the purpose of facilitating these discussions, on 18 January 2018, the secretariat, at my request, circulated a compilation of past proposals on programmes of work presented under agenda items since the year 2000. The document was circulated again yesterday, for convenience, to delegations.

To the delegations that have enquired why we are doing so, I have clarified that this compilation of programmes of work shows very clearly the amount of time and effort put in by delegations over the years. In a certain sense, as I said the last time, it is a tribute to their efforts, to their work. It is not that they did not work, but that their efforts did not work in the end. I think this is the distinction which I would like to draw as we go into today's discussion.

Another reason I think we should be doing this is because these proposals do inspire us. They show us the limits, in one way, but they also have to be modified and read in the context of current developments. I think that today's discussion – which we propose to have shortly – will help us, in a very transparent way, to get to the idea of having a programme of work. It also meets the aspirations of those who feel that this body should be not just be talking, but getting into action. I think that this is a middle step in between that and something which might be beneficial. I therefore suggest that you reflect on these past proposals, be informed by them in your comments today, but not be constrained by them in any way.

It is my intention to conduct this discussion in an informal setting, suspending the formal plenary meeting and reconvening in an informal meeting. However, I have also been challenged for having this discussion in an informal setting, as many delegations feel that our deliberations should go on record. I therefore suggest that we start our deliberations in an informal setting, allowing for an interactive debate and, based on this discussion, hopefully, we could narrow down the proposals of items for a programme of work to a much shorter list than the one circulated to you. This, I believe, could allow for a more focused deliberation in the plenary meeting that would enable us to find common ground. I hope this approach will be agreeable to all delegations.

I will now proceed to move on to today's list of speakers for the general debate. I have the following delegations on my list: Egypt, Poland, the Russian Federation, Myanmar and Kazakhstan. If there are any other delegations, it would be appreciated if they could make it known to the secretariat. I recognize Mexico. It is my understanding that these delegations wish to take the floor in the formal plenary meeting.

I give the floor to the Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. Youssef (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, let me congratulate you at the outset on your assumption of the presidency and assure you of my delegation's full support. I am confident that your wide-ranging experience and knowledge will enable you to guide our work constructively. I also wish to thank Mr. Michael Møller for his opening statement and to pledge our cooperation to ensure that this session produces the desired results.

I would like to begin my statement with a personal observation. While I am proud to return to this forum after 20 years, I find it regrettable that the Conference on Disarmament, as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body, has been unable to adopt a programme of work since 1996. Nevertheless, Egyptian support for the Conference remains

steadfast. Priority must be given at the beginning of this year's Conference to the adoption by consensus of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work in order to launch multilateral negotiations on disarmament.

Let me clarify my country's view regarding the components of the programme. First, Egypt attaches great importance to negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a comprehensive nuclear weapons treaty, the ultimate aim of which is to bring about the total and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons within a fixed period of time and with an effective international oversight and monitoring system. Egypt assigns top priority to nuclear disarmament, and looks forward to speedy progress in that regard, alongside other Conference agenda items, as part of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work. Accordingly, Egypt expects the programme of work to provide for the establishment of a subsidiary body to discuss nuclear disarmament. The Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons concluded unanimously that: "There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control." The nuclear weapon States bear a special responsibility to fulfil this obligation, in accordance with article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. On 7 June 2017, for the first time since the use of nuclear weapons, a non-discriminatory legal basis was established for the prohibition, *inter alia*, of the development, testing, production, manufacture, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, use and threat of the use of nuclear weapons. Regrettably, this advance was achieved in a forum other than the Conference on Disarmament.

Secondly, it is crucially important for the Conference to negotiate a legally binding and non-discriminatory multilateral instrument, subject to effective international oversight, that prohibits the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive nuclear devices, in accordance with report CD/1299 of the Special Coordinator and the mandate contained therein. As the instrument in question must achieve the objectives of both nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, it must include stockpiles of fissile materials within its scope. An instrument that seeks to achieve the goals of nuclear non-proliferation solely through a ban on future production is not perceived as a priority for Egypt and cannot make a genuine contribution to nuclear disarmament. The 13 practical steps adopted at the 2000 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review Conference included a call for negotiations in the Conference on such a treaty. The call has met with no response during the 18 years since the adoption of the 13 practical steps.

Thirdly, Egypt attaches particular importance to the development of a legal system for the promotion and maintenance of outer space for peaceful activities and its preservation as a common heritage of humankind. Egypt and Sri Lanka have for many years been submitting draft resolutions to the United Nations General Assembly on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The most recent was resolution 72/26 adopted in 2017. Egypt calls for the negotiation of a binding legal instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Fourthly, Egypt is convinced that the total elimination of nuclear weapons constitutes the only safeguard against the threat or use of nuclear weapons. For as long as the complete elimination of nuclear weapons remains pending, Egypt reaffirms its position that there is an urgent need for a binding, universal, unconditional and irreversible legal instrument that provides effective safeguards in all circumstances to non-nuclear-weapon States against the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing and are necessary for the promotion of international peace and security. This close concordance between nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, together with the principle of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, facilitated the adoption of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Conference on Disarmament must fulfil its mandate and commence negotiations on legally binding instruments concerning the four main items on its agenda. The persistent stalemate in the Conference will further undermine its mandate and may gradually lead to its termination. The United Nations High-level Conference to be held in New York in 2018, in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/32, provides an opportunity for the international community to undertake a review of

developments in Conference on Disarmament negotiations concerning the early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, there have been no such developments in the Conference. The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is the only recent development in multilateral disarmament negotiations. Egypt urges the Conference on Disarmament to adopt, at the earliest possible opportunity during its 2018 session, a balanced and comprehensive programme of work prior to the convening of the United Nations High-level Conference as an indicator of the commitment of member States of the Conference on Disarmament to the preservation of its mandate.

Mr. President, Egypt has persistently called for action to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The States that sponsored the 1995 resolution on the Middle East bear full responsibility for its implementation, given the failure to implement the practical steps set forth in the Final Document of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review Conference. Egypt is prepared to take action on any constructive and practical proposals aimed at achieving that goal. The resolution on the Middle East remains the basis for the establishment of such a zone until such time as its aims and objectives are fully realized. Egypt vigorously calls for the universality of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and for the placement of all unsafeguarded nuclear facilities in the Middle East under comprehensive safeguards agreements.

Mr. President, Egypt appreciates your commitment to substantive discussions in the Conference from the outset and calls for the early adoption of a programme of work, in accordance with rules 27, 28 and 29 of the rules of procedure, which state that it should be drawn up by the President of the Conference on Disarmament with the assistance of the Secretary-General of the Conference. Following the adoption of the agenda, the next logical step is to engage in consultations to develop the programme of work. Egypt is ready to play a constructive role in that regard.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we wish you a successful presidency and assure you of our willingness to offer our wholehearted assistance for your efforts to enable to Conference to embark on its substantive work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Egypt for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to His Excellency, Mr. Zbigniew Czech of Poland. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Czech (Poland): Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Madam Director, first of all, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of your duty and thank you for your warm words of welcome. To launch a new session of the Conference on Disarmament is not an easy task and let me assure you of my delegation's full support in this endeavour. Let me also welcome our new colleagues: the Ambassadors of Austria, Egypt, Italy, Ireland, Mexico and Peru.

Mr. President, this year Poland became a non-permanent member of the Security Council. At the turn of April and May, we will chair the second Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We are also a member of one of the committees of the Ottawa Convention. We feel therefore a great responsibility for security policy issues as well as for strengthening the international system.

Poland fully aligns itself with the statement on behalf of the European Union. Let me, however, concentrate on one particular and important issue which is the Conference on Disarmament. Poland promotes and strongly supports bringing the Conference on Disarmament back to work. We have another year at our disposal and another hope. It is important to stay on alert and not to lose momentum. The Conference does not work in a vacuum and it cannot be disconnected from the real world which is changing constantly. Nevertheless, it should not be driven only by tensions, conflicts and highly sophisticated political calculations.

Mr. President, I totally share your view that the reasons for the current stalemate lie mainly outside of the Conference on Disarmament. It is true; but we need to ask ourselves whether we have explored all the possibilities within the Conference framework. In this

context, let me thank you, Mr. President, for the useful compilation you have distributed. Every year, we devote much of our efforts to procedural and organizational aspects of our work while the work of functioning multilateral institutions is based on them. This is why we need to look at them even more closely. If we look at the history of the Conference and of the preceding Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, we can see that the notions of agenda, programme of work and subsidiary bodies have constantly evolved over the years. The Conference on Disarmament agenda has not been written in stone. We used to have a different type of agenda. It is worth mentioning the so-called Decalogue, which contained 10 items, including conventional weapons and a disarmament and security policy. We should build on past achievements and, after adoption of conventions and treaties like the Chemical Weapons Convention and Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, we should add new elements to the system.

The Conference on Disarmament has never been a purely negotiating or deliberative body, it was always a negotiating and deliberative body at the same time. For instance, it took four years, from 1980 to 1984, to evolve a mandate on chemical weapons from a deliberative to a semi-negotiating one and another six years to give, in 1990, full negotiating power to the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons. Another example is the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: the first talks based on a deliberative mandate were held in 1982, while negotiations started in 1984. Also, the subsidiary bodies used to have different names, shapes and functions.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Madam Director, I am saying this to remind us that the Conference on Disarmament is and must remain a living institution. It needs to become a donor of security solutions again; however, these solutions need to be preceded by a vibrant political debate. We believe that there is a way ahead for the Conference on Disarmament and that last year's work by the working group proposed by Romania and led by Ambassador Lynn of Myanmar proved its usefulness in spite of not being conclusive enough.

Now, we have to ensure the continuation of this spirit. There are many challenges, but also several important disarmament processes and initiatives in parallel. In fact, we have much more in common than what divides us. I am confident that if we explore together all possible avenues, we will ultimately find this magic spark which can ignite the Conference's engine.

Mr. President, let me assure you that Poland will be as constructive as possible in this debate and that we are ready to join any consensus on this programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Poland and we also wish him well as he chairs the second Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

I now wish to give the floor to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation, Mr. Alexey Borodavkin, for what I understand is going to be his farewell address to this body. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Borodavkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, on behalf of the Russian delegation, I am pleased to welcome you as the first President of the Conference on Disarmament at its 2018 session. I also welcome Mr. Møller, the Secretary-General of the Conference. Needless to say, all six Presidents of this year's Conference may count on effective cooperation from the Russian delegation.

Distinguished colleagues, my statement today is truly a special occasion for me. In a few days, I will be finishing my assignment here as Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, including, of course, the Conference on Disarmament.

As I look back over the past six years of my work at the Conference, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, there is, of course, a feeling of regret that our forum has not managed for such a long period of time to get back to substantive work. Moreover, the prospects for achieving a compromise remain uncertain, primarily because of the well-known differences between delegations on the programme of work of the Conference.

Indeed, to be frank, the global landscape itself, unfortunately, is not all that conducive to further progress on disarmament.

On the other hand, despite all the difficulties, the situation is far from hopeless. For years, members of the Conference and observer countries have made strenuous sustained efforts to break the long-standing stalemate at the forum. There have been proposals and ideas, in particular on the programme of work of the Conference, which, in my view, could be the basis for building a consensus, provided of course that all interested parties showed flexibility and a readiness to make compromises. The very fact that States with a sense of responsibility for the fate of this forum are continuing to seek a way out of such a difficult situation is encouraging.

In this connection, I would like to share a few observations that I believe might help us to overcome the crisis in the work of the Conference and preserve the viability of the forum.

I believe the point is to cherish the Conference as our common heritage. Who else if not the members of the Conference could be held up as an example of respect for its standing as the sole multilateral mechanism for negotiations on disarmament? In this regard, it is vitally important for delegations themselves to steer clear of actions that one way and another challenge the principles underlying the work of the Conference.

First and foremost, we are referring to the attempts to create disarmament forums parallel to the Conference, where decisions affecting the vital interests of all States, bar none, are taken by a simple vote. We see this not as a sign of the strength of the arguments made by proponents of tracks separate to the Conference but rather as a sign of the weakness of their position, namely, if you will, going down the path of least resistance and, thereby, merely giving the illusion of progress. We must abandon such bad practice, which is adversely affecting the international community more and more.

As far as the situation at the Conference is concerned, for the sake of all of us, we must not resort to, or should at least minimize the level of, rhetoric on controversial political issues. Given the specific nature of the mandate of the Conference, it is not able to make any substantial practical contribution to the resolution of intractable international conflicts. The harm caused by exchanging accusations is clear: it further poisons relations between delegations and the overall environment at the Conference.

It is clear that the increase in conflicting disarmament priorities has done nothing to facilitate compromise on the programme of work. It is unreasonable to expect progress as long as some members of the Conference still try to realize their ambitions without regard for the views of the others, indeed, to the detriment of the security of various States. Real results may be achieved only if the purposes and principles that we uphold are served through compromise against the backdrop of today's actual geopolitical setting.

Disarmament processes have never been simple or easy. Experience teaches us that a universally acceptable outcome may be produced only through dialogue based on mutual respect, with due regard for the security concerns of every member of the Conference. Consensus decision-making is a way of maintaining a balance of the interests of each and every one of us at the Conference. That is how we may ensure that the agreements reached are strong and lasting and universal in nature, as the experience of agreements previously negotiated at the Conference has shown.

You may rest assured that Russia is ready to engage in constructive dialogue so that, together, we may find ways of improving the viability of the Conference. To this end, previous proposals put forward, including those made by the Russian delegation itself, could be helpful.

As you know, Russia and China jointly introduced a draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space. Concluding it would help pre-empt any effort to turn near-Earth space into a new arena for armed confrontation.

With a view to getting the Conference to return to its substantive work as soon as possible, we have also proposed that it should deal with the topic of meeting the growing threat of weapons of mass destruction as they pertain to terrorism. Last year, we drafted a

compromise programme of work of the Conference (CD/WP.600), which remains on the table. We believe that this is the most realistic option for ensuring the viability of the Conference given that there are still differences between delegations over core issues for the Conference already dating back two decades which, unfortunately, we have not managed to resolve.

I hope that the Russian draft programme of work will still be adopted by the Conference.

Mr. President, as the first President at the 2018 session of the Conference, you have been given the responsibility of setting the tone for the practical work of the Conference. I am confident that, under your leadership, by working together, we will be equal to the task of changing the situation at the Conference for the better.

The President: I thank Ambassador Borodavkin for his farewell speech and wish him the very best as he moves on from Geneva. I also want to use this opportunity, on behalf of all my colleagues, to thank the Ambassador for the proposals and the interest he took in the Conference on Disarmament and its activities as he has just outlined. Having known him for pretty much all the time I have been here, on behalf of the presidency and Sri Lanka, I wish him the very best for the future.

We now move on to the next speaker on my list and that is Ambassador Htin Lynn from Myanmar. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Lynn (Myanmar): Mr. President, Secretary-General of the Conference, dear colleagues, at the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of your presidency of the Conference at this critical juncture. We are confident that under your able guidance the Conference will be able to make substantive progress in its work. You can be sure of my delegation's full support and cooperation. My delegation thanks the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her important message delivered in this chamber last week.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to our new colleagues, Ambassador Gaffey of Ireland, Ambassador De La Puente Ribeyro of Peru, Ambassador Flores Liera of Mexico, Ambassador Incarnato of Italy, Ambassador Czech of Poland and Ambassador Youssef of Egypt, whom I met here in this room for the first time, 20 years ago.

I would also like to extend my best wishes to Ambassador Alexey Borodavkin; we enjoyed working together last year. I wish you every success and happiness, Ambassador.

Global peace and security today are marked by rising challenges, continued uncertainty and worrying trends. The tension endangering the Korean Peninsula is the most worrying peace and security challenge in the world today. While the United Nations Security Council resolutions are yet to be implemented, recent developments such as high-level talks and Olympic diplomacy are rare rays of sunshine in the Korean Peninsula. Such engagement must continue to allow more room for diplomacy and dialogue.

We recognize the progress achieved so far under the New START Treaty. However, uncertainty is still looming beyond the expiration of the New START Treaty in 2021. Modernization campaigns are also taking us further away from a world free of nuclear weapons.

It is also disturbing to note that global military expenditures now exceed cold war levels. In the general debate of the First Committee last year, I indicated that if we churn out 20 per cent of global military expenditure for 15 years and we invest it in rural and urban areas and in social protection, we will achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, as we decided. Achieving the Goals shall bring about just, peaceful and prosperous societies and a better security environment for our future generations. The threat from terrorism is still unabated; such a common threat requires our collective responses.

Despite frustration at the impasse in the Conference on Disarmament for over two decades, Myanmar continues to attach great importance to and believes in the Conference's potential as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum for the international community.

From the very first General Assembly resolution, nuclear disarmament has been a principled objective for the United Nations. It is also the highest priority on the disarmament agenda of Myanmar. As urged in General Assembly resolution 72/38, Myanmar supports the establishment of a subsidiary body in the Conference on Disarmament to deal with nuclear disarmament and the immediate commencement of negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention. The same resolution also calls for “the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a non-discriminatory multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices on the basis of the report of the Special Coordinator and the mandate contained therein.”

Bearing this in mind, I explored how we can open the door to a treaty on fissile material in the work of the Conference. Different positions on the level of priorities, the scope of a future treaty and balancing them with other national priorities are among the key questions to be answered. Given the feedback and initial support already expressed last year, I tend to believe that we could look at the possibility of establishing a subsidiary body to initiate, without preconditions, negotiations on a treaty on fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. However, it is not a secret that a stand-alone decision on this treaty for a programme of work cannot be taken. The work of the high-level expert preparatory group led by Canada can definitely contribute to our work here in parallel or when the time comes.

Speaking from my own experience, the prevention of an arms race in outer space remains a priority for the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference could also explore the possibility of establishing a subsidiary body with an appropriate mandate. How we define and consider what an appropriate mandate is are also very much interdependent issues. Pending the elimination of nuclear weapons, it is urgent and legitimate for the non-nuclear-weapon States to call for unconditional security assurances in the form of a legally binding instrument. The Conference should be responding to this call by creating a subsidiary body with an appropriate mandate.

Let me share a few additional thoughts on our way forward. There were different views on the creation of the working group on the way ahead and its work last year; but there are hard facts. First, substantive discussions on all agenda items of the Conference on Disarmament took place. Second, these discussions brought us to a better level of understanding of each others’ security concerns and approach to them. While the work of the working group cannot replace a programme of work, it is the next available alternative to the absence of a programme of work. I see the glass as half full.

Let me briefly refer to the end game of the working group on the way ahead last year. As I was tasked, among others under document CD/2090, to identify common ground for a programme of work with a negotiating mandate and to consider steps for the way ahead, I developed and circulated a non-paper outlining draft recommendations for a possible programme of work on all agenda items of the Conference. Despite the positive response by some, there was no consensus on the draft recommendations. More time was needed to resolve remaining substantive questions and I then decided not to pursue the non-paper any further. However, I believe that the non-paper is an honest reflection of our consultations at that point in time, although more consultations were required to make it acceptable to all. In my reflection on the work of the Conference on Disarmament, the following elements strike me the most.

First, reviving the Conference is a goal that all Conference on Disarmament members and the international community fully shared and it is intertwined with the other goal, which is giving new momentum and impetus to global disarmament efforts through negotiating disarmament treaties. These goals should be at the core of our consideration in launching our activities this year.

Secondly, as every effort is being made to adopt and implement a balanced and comprehensive programme of work for the Conference on the basis of its agenda and the core issues, we should not limit ourselves to traditional priorities. New challenges such as lethal autonomous systems, cybersecurity threats, chemical and biological terrorism and the

rapid evolution of technology, as just outlined by the Secretary-General of the Conference himself, should also find their way into our work as part of reframing and modernizing long-standing disarmament and non-proliferation priorities.

Thirdly, while we are proactive, greater political will, flexibility and accommodation by all member States of the Conference is essential to translate all our security concerns into a programme of work.

Lastly, we cannot remain complacent, passive and even overwhelmed by frustration. I have this argument in the room quite often.

Let me conclude by underlining that we all have an obligation to our profession, our Governments and to the international community in delivering what is expected from the Conference on Disarmament. Together we can cut the Gordian knot.

The President: I thank Ambassador Lynn for his very sober and informed assessment of where the Conference on Disarmament stands, having had the benefit of spending a lot of last year looking at these issues. When I talked about people who had worked to try to get the Conference on Disarmament moving – although it has not worked – it was people like Ambassador Lynn I had in mind in more recent times and many others who have preceded all of us. I hope that we can pick up the threads of Ambassador Lynn's assessment as well as the very good individual proposals and areas which need to be looked at, starting with the Secretary-General's comments on science and technology, the Russian Ambassador's observations about chemical and biological weapons and many of the other proposals on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT), among other things.

So, I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Ms. Zhanar Aitzhanova. Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Aitzhanova (Kazakhstan): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to congratulate you on the assumption of the first presidency of the 2018 session of the Conference on Disarmament. The delegation of Kazakhstan stands ready to join efforts with you, your team and other delegations in overcoming a long-lasting impasse in the Conference. Using this opportunity, I would also like to thank you for sharing a compilation of proposals presented on the programme of work listed under each agenda item since the year 2000. We believe that this important document could be a good help for discussions on the programme of work. We will state our position on the issue later today during informal discussions.

I also would like to reiterate that our delegation remains committed to the goals and objectives of the Conference. The Conference on Disarmament is the sole multilateral forum fully authorized to negotiate all aspects of disarmament problems. We attach great importance to commencing meaningful work within the Conference. That is why we need to move ahead with flexibility and the keen sense of responsibility that has been entrusted to us.

(spoke in Russian)

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Alexey Borodavkin, for the collaborative work he has done here at this forum and with international organizations in Geneva as a whole. In particular, I would like to single out the personal contribution that Ambassador Borodavkin made to finding compromises on the work of the Conference on Disarmament during the presidency of the Russian Federation last year. I wish him every success in his new post and all the very best.

(spoke in English)

Mr. President, let me finish my brief intervention by assuring you again of the full support and cooperation of the delegation of Kazakhstan during your tenure.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Kazakhstan and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Mexico, Ms. Flores Liera. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am taking the floor to request that my statement be reflected in the official record and to take the opportunity to wish Ambassador Borodavkin every success in his new role.

Mr. President, I would like to thank you for the consultations and your efforts in relation to the programme of work for the 2018 session. As my delegation stated at the plenary meeting on 23 January, I would like to reiterate that it is very important for the Conference on Disarmament to fulfil the negotiating mandate assigned to it by the General Assembly at its first special session devoted to disarmament. We hope that during this first presidency of the 2018 session we will be able to focus our efforts on adopting a programme of work that will enable us to fulfil that mandate.

We are aware that delegations have different priorities and although my delegation also has its own priorities we are prepared to begin negotiations in this forum under any of the recently adopted agenda items.

The compilation of proposals that you have shared with us reflects the topics proposed between 2000 and 2017. It clearly documents the diverse wording used in agenda items. We certainly hope that the compilation will be discussed and we await the outcome of your consultations, confident that we will be able to draft a proposal for a programme of work that can be assessed as a whole rather than by considering its constituent parts separately.

I would like to recall that discussions on elements to include in a programme of work have already been held on various occasions, most recently within the framework of the 2017 session of the working group on the way ahead, whose mandate included taking stock of progress on all items on the agenda of the Conference, identifying issues for substantive work under the agenda, identifying common ground for a programme of work with a negotiating mandate and considering steps for the way ahead. I would therefore like to express my country's concerns about continuing to convene meetings on this subject without a concrete proposal by the Presidency for a programme of work, as we will engage in a debate where everyone will reiterate their well-known positions and we will end up with the same outcome as we have seen during the last 20 years.

In this regard, my delegation would urge you to spare no effort to comply with rules 28 and 29 of the Rules of Procedure and to submit a draft programme of work that will allow us to fulfil our mandate.

We would like to reiterate our total commitment and readiness to support efforts to achieve disarmament and ensure the proper functioning of the Conference. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Mexico for challenging all of us to come up with some results. I think this is the right spirit as we move into the next segment of our discussions. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of India, Mr. Amandeep Gill. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Gill (India): Mr. President, it is a great pleasure to see you presiding over our work in the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation pledges its fullest cooperation to you in the discharge of your duties. Thank you also for your stocktaking paper and your work with the other Presidents of this session in order for them to work as a cohesive unit. We are also grateful for your thoughtful opening statement. In fact, you have captured very well in a banner headline our tasks for this year and that is to maintain the integrity and credibility of the Conference as well as to create forward movement and momentum, including by capturing the attention of higher political levels.

We have new colleagues in the Conference on Disarmament and I wish to welcome the distinguished Ambassadors of Austria, Egypt, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Peru and Poland. Our new colleagues have given us some food for thought, even in their first interventions. Our colleague from Poland reminded us that there is no line, so to speak, between negotiations and other aspects of substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament. There is no stark distinction between what might be called technical preparatory work and what might be termed as political negotiating work. The work of the Group of Seven helped us to get ready for the detailed negotiations on verifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-

Ban Treaty. The many years of work on the mandate and on how to engage the industry helped us move forward when the political climate was propitious on the Chemical Weapons Convention. Our colleague from Egypt underlined how our agenda continues to remain contemporary and relevant. We can in fact see a reflection of all our contemporary challenges in each and every one of the seven agenda items that we have in front of us.

Now, against this background where the Conference on Disarmament remains relevant – the Conference remains the only forum where all the possessors of nuclear weapons are present and have the opportunity to address contemporary challenges – what should be our goals for this year? As our colleague from Russia has pointed out, this remains a challenging year because of the lack of trust among the major Powers, certain developments that we have seen in recent years, the march of technology and other factors that colleagues have mentioned today.

I would like to suggest four points for focused consideration, in fact, for action this year, if possible. First, the Conference must move for the early adoption of a programme of work that allows for substantive work, including possible negotiations on the core agenda items. As has been the practice in the past, we can move forward step by step. The protection of the rule of consensus is there whenever any one of us feels – and that is our prerogative – that the direction and the pace of substantive movement on any issue is not something that would accord with our national security interest.

The second item of focus this year should be tightening the connections, the links that the Conference on Disarmament has with other parts of the institutional framework for disarmament.

Mr. President, you have pointed out the opportunities that the 2018 calendar offers us. So I think that if we look at those opportunities in the context of bringing together various parts of the institutional framework, we would have concrete action points. In addition to the reference that was made by our distinguished colleague from Egypt to the high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament in May 2018, I would like to mention the new work that is starting on nuclear disarmament verification as well as the ongoing work on the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) in the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group.

The third area of action for this year should be to promote, to enhance, and to strengthen trust and confidence, not only among the States that possess nuclear weapons, but also across the non-nuclear-weapon State and weapon State divide. We know that this trust has eroded both fronts and therefore it is an urgent task for the Conference to contribute to rebuilding trust. How can we do that?

Our colleague from Russia pointed out that work on addressing the threat of terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction or related materials and facilities could be one such area. Some type of substantive work on outer space could be another example. Science and technology, which cut across the various agenda items that we are dealing with, could be another area where relatively objective, controversy-free discussions could be started that would help us build traction for work on more sensitive issues. And why not? If there are concerns about the risks of nuclear war, that restraints on the use of nuclear weapons may be eroding, then why should we not have a discussion on nuclear doctrines, nuclear-use scenarios. If it is not possible in the Conference on Disarmament, then maybe it could be on the margins of the Conference, so that we can begin to address another potential area where confidence might be eroding.

Finally, I think that our working methods need to be looked at this year. Again, to help us get started, we do not need to be too ambitious. However, if we could aim at coming up with a revised version of our rules of procedure, in which only one word would be changed from what is there; if that word, in paragraph 9, could read “eight” instead of “four”, so that one presidency would preside over the work of the Conference for eight working weeks and not four working weeks. This seemingly minor step might increase the efficiency of our work and might bring the Conference’s work closer to what is obtained in other parts of the disarmament institutional framework in Geneva, where there is a president and a couple of vice-chairs that help the presidency in undertaking its tasks. It is not exactly the same thing; there are still three Presidents, but I think it would be more in line with the requirements of today.

To conclude, we look forward to the informal discussions on the stocktaking paper and we have two very good examples from that stocktaking paper: the 2009 Algerian programme of work, which was adopted by consensus; and the 2015 Mexican programme of work, which we could not adopt. So we look forward to a discussion on what could be a balanced and comprehensive programme of work for early adoption this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to bid farewell to our distinguished colleague from the Russian Federation, Ambassador Borodavkin. We thank him for his friendship, his engagement on all issues that concern us here as representatives to the Conference on Disarmament and we wish him all the very best for his future endeavours.

The President: I thank Ambassador Gill for his food for thought, in the context of what we will be moving into. Many of those points will be carried forward, I hope, into our next round of discussions. But before we go there, let me give the floor to Ambassador Fu Cong of China. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President. I have requested the floor to express my regret at the departure of Ambassador Borodavkin, Permanent Representative of Russia. During his tenure, and especially when he served as President of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Borodavkin made a great effort to break the deadlock in the Conference, demonstrating superb diplomatic skills and professionalism. In addition to his work in the Conference, Ambassador Borodavkin has been active in such other fields as human rights and development, where he has made important contributions. Cooperation between the Chinese and Russian permanent missions also rose to a new height during his tenure, and we express our sincere admiration for this. I earnestly wish Ambassador Borodavkin all the best, and even greater and more outstanding achievements in his new post.

I should also like to take this opportunity to welcome the new Ambassadors from Austria, Egypt, Italy, Peru, Poland and others. The Chinese delegation and I personally look forward to good cooperation with them. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China. Ambassador Borodavkin has requested the floor.

Mr. Borodavkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, I would like to thank you and our colleagues for the kind words and good wishes addressed to me here today and to wish the Conference once again every success in its work. Farewell. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much. As you move on, we wish you the very best for the future.

Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor? I see none. In which case, I will suspend the formal plenary meeting and continue in an informal meeting. Let us take a five-minute break and get back. The meeting is suspended.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.