

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and forty-ninth plenary meeting


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President: Ms. Veronika Bard(Sweden)

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The President: I call to order the 1449th meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, we continue this morning the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. Please allow me to suspend the meeting to welcome our first distinguished guest for this morning, His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Yıldız, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Thank you, Excellency, for addressing us here in the Conference on Disarmament today.

Mr. Yıldız (Turkey): It is an honour for me to address this Conference today, Madam President. This year, Turkey is one of the six countries to preside over the Conference. That gives me further pleasure to be here. I wish to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for putting disarmament issues at the top of his agenda. This is a great encouragement for all of us. I would also like to thank Ms. Nakamitsu and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs for their tireless efforts.

Madam President, all speakers have emphasized the importance of the Conference. They have underlined its unique place in international forums and its special mandate of negotiating legally binding disarmament instruments. Many have also rightly voiced their disappointment at the lack of substantive progress. It is our common responsibility to create an atmosphere of compromise and flexibility to maintain the relevance of this Conference and enable the resumption of its substantive work. The Conference has the potential to make a difference – a real difference. The biological and chemical weapons conventions and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are proof of this potential.

We need to find consensus over a programme of work at the Conference. Negotiations on a non-discriminatory and verifiable treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosives would be a step in the right direction. Naturally, such a treaty would need to take into account the legitimate security concerns of all. Our ultimate goal is a world without nuclear weapons. The successful and universal implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is the right starting point for this. A pending commitment of the 2010 action plan was the convening of an international conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. This commitment cannot be overlooked.

The Treaty and the current review cycle should not be undermined by efforts undertaken elsewhere. We look forward to the upcoming Treaty preparatory committee meeting and we will engage actively and constructively in its work. The three pillars of the Treaty should be addressed in a balanced manner. States that are in full compliance with their international obligations have the right to tap into the benefits of nuclear energy.

In recent weeks, the Korean Peninsula has been in a phase of *pax olympica*. However, the situation on the Peninsula is still tense. The ballistic missile launches and nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have endangered peace and security. We join the international community in calling upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to act reasonably and responsibly and to abide by United Nations Security Council resolutions.

On the matter of the Iranian nuclear programme, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action stands before us as a successful example of multilateral diplomacy. We all value it. It should be respected and upheld by all.

On another issue, the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is crucial for global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. We once again urge the remaining annex 2 States to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay.

Madam President, the Conference possesses the mandate, rules of procedure and membership composition to perform its duties. What it lacks is the necessary political will. It is up to us to overcome this challenge. Turkey is ready to do its part to make this happen.

The President: Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short while to escort Mr. Yıldız from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, I would like to thank you for once again giving me the opportunity to speak at this authoritative forum. The Conference on Disarmament plays a unique role in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, and also, of course, occupies a special place in the enduring international machinery that it forms together with the United Nations Commission on Disarmament and the First Committee of the General Assembly. Under the aegis of the Conference, fundamental agreements have been developed, which support our faith in humanity's capacity to avoid self-destruction. Increasing the effectiveness of the forum has defining significance for transforming the fragmentation of worldwide efforts to achieve the disarmament agenda, find rational compromises and create the conditions to support peace and equal and indivisible security for all. In today's complex conditions in the international arena, systematic collective efforts to ensure security and stability take on a special importance, on both a global and a regional scale.

We must recognize that in recent years the work of our forum has faltered. Therefore, it is essential to overcome our differences and finally agree upon a balanced programme of work for the Conference. Resolving current issues in arms control and non-proliferation requires us to urgently resume our negotiation work. The situation can be rectified, as we see it, if we rely on the rich heritage and long-standing traditions of negotiation which unite all the parties to this forum. Historical experience shows us that even in the most difficult periods it is vital to demonstrate determination and responsibility, to compromise on narrow national interests and to give a consolidated response to the major challenges of the age.

The central item on the international agenda of course remains the problem of nuclear disarmament. As a responsible and consistent supporter of this process, Russia is making a special contribution to the further reduction of strategic offensive arms. On 5 February, we confirmed that the limits for delivery vehicles and warheads under the New START Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America had been met. Thus, Russia's nuclear arsenal has actually been reduced by more than 85 per cent compared to what it was at the height of the cold war.

Furthermore, despite the impressive achievements made in implementing this Russian-American Treaty, we are forced to draw the attention of our colleagues in Washington to many outstanding issues, some of which relate to the unilateral removal from accountability of a significant number of delivery vehicles, essentially bypassing the procedures set out in the Treaty, which assume that the methods used to remove delivery vehicles from accountability are understood by the other country. It is also concerning that the approach of the United States of America has changed under their new nuclear strategy, which foresees an increased role for nuclear arms. This includes developing and deploying so-called "low-yield" warheads, which will lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons.

Nonetheless, in line with the spirit and the letter of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we have come very close to the point where further efforts in the direction of nuclear disarmament must involve all States with nuclear-weapons capability. Moreover, we cannot ignore the new reality: disarmament is impossible without considering the whole range of factors that have a destructive impact on strategic stability and international security, including the now unrestricted deployment of the global ballistic missile defence system, the development of high-precision non-nuclear strategic offensive arms, the non-ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the prospect of strike weapons being placed in space.

Nuclear disarmament is also impeded by the continued presence of American non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, along with the destabilizing practice of so-called

“nuclear sharing”. As is well known, in the related nuclear exercises, and in gross violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, North Atlantic Treaty Organization members participate in planning for the use of American non-strategic nuclear weapons and are provided with the relevant skills. It should be clear to anyone that this involves United States military personnel training the armed forces of European countries to use tactical nuclear weapons against the Russian Federation.

Russia, I would like to reiterate, does not have any tactical nuclear weapons deployed and does not carry out nuclear strike exercises. We have concentrated our warheads in central storage sites on our national territory. Under these circumstances, the fact that the United States of America has tactical nuclear weapons ready for use in Europe is not only a relic of the cold war but a blatantly aggressive posture. I hope that European citizens will manage to express a firm “No” to the presence on their territory of the most dangerous weapons of mass destruction, especially since they belong to the only State that has ever used them, against the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Without considering all the factors that affect strategic stability or taking account of the principle of ensuring equal security for all, it is impossible to move closer to the elimination of nuclear weapons, as called for by the authors of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This initiative, as we have repeatedly said, not only does not help progress towards the noble aim of a nuclear-free world, but also creates problems for maintaining the viability of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and ensuring the effectiveness of the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty. Incidentally, this year it will be 50 years since that Treaty was opened for signature.

To preserve the functioning of this key instrument, it is also critically important that we see tangible developments towards the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was drafted here at the Conference, and which could form a basis for overcoming the divide between nuclear and non-nuclear States. Furthermore, it is necessary to finally achieve real progress in holding an international conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

I would like to discuss chemical disarmament separately. Russia has completely destroyed its stockpile of chemical warfare agents. At the same time, we see the paradoxical situation in which the United States of America, one of the key parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which once insisted on the adoption of a global legal obligation to destroy chemical weapons by 2007, now holds the largest arsenal of this type of weapon of mass destruction in the world, while the prospects for eliminating that arsenal remain unclear. Meanwhile Washington, citing fake news specialists such as the wholly discredited White Helmets, makes absurd complaints against the Government of Syria, which, under the extremely difficult conditions of a fight against international terrorism, has destroyed its stockpile of chemical weapons under the strictest possible international oversight in response to the Moscow–Washington joint initiative and continues to cooperate with the secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. It is sad that the United States and its allies are using the unsubstantiated allegations that Damascus has made use of toxic chemicals as an instrument of anti-Syrian geopolitical engineering.

Just one hour ago, at the initiative of France, an informal meeting took place not far from here to promote their latest anti-Syrian brainchild, the “International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons”, founded on 23 January in Paris. We reaffirm that we do not recognize the establishment of such selective, non-inclusive initiatives, designed so that a cosy group of like-minded people lacking any alternative points of view can substitute itself for debate within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. It defies belief that high-ranking representatives of the United Nations Secretariat considered it appropriate to participate in this non-inclusive event.

Neither should we forget the threat of a biological weapon capable of surpassing all known means of human destruction in its deadliness. As before, the United States is blocking the development of a verification mechanism for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. I hope that our American colleagues will take responsibility for

finding a way out of this impasse. For the moment, they unfortunately prefer to stick with the impasse, at the same time attempting, by forcing onto various countries bilateral agreements that do not fall under the Convention, to establish a structure for biosecurity controlled only by the United States and thus open to manipulation.

During the Russian presidency of the Conference on Disarmament last year, with the assistance of a number of responsible and reasonable delegations, we secured the inclusion on the agenda of the proposal to draft an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism. Substantive discussion on the matter needs to continue during the current session. I hope that this will be done. The drafting of this especially relevant instrument, which meets the interests of all States, will allow the Conference to resume its work in complete accordance with its mandate.

Another priority for us is to avert an arms race in space. Russia is not the only country alarmed at the prospect of the weaponization of near-Earth space, and this is confirmed by the broad support shown for our initiatives aimed at countering this threat. I would reiterate that it was here in Geneva 10 years ago that we and our Chinese friends circulated a draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space objects, and in 2014 that we proposed an updated version of the draft.

I think that, without drafting and adopting a legally binding international agreement containing reliable safeguards against the placement of weapons in space, it will be virtually impossible to resolve the issues of ensuring international security and strategic stability. We are prepared to discuss any concerns with all stakeholders. We consider the launch of the Group of Governmental Experts on the prevention of an arms race in outer space scheduled for this year to be the optimum mechanism for the joint search for answers and the additional measure needed to boost this process in the Conference on Disarmament.

Russia is ready to resume negotiations at the Conference on the basis of any balanced programme of work decided upon by consensus. We have no taboo subjects in relation to any of the agenda items of the Conference on Disarmament. We have both the political will and the expert capacity to begin full-fledged negotiations here in this forum. Like the Secretary-General of the United Nations, speaking here two days ago, we welcome the adoption by the Conference on 16 February of the decision to establish five subsidiary bodies to find solutions with the aim of launching negotiations on the agenda items.

In conclusion, I would like to state that Russia calls on all of you to demonstrate political will and the greatest possible responsibility in order to resume the substantive work of the Conference. We are convinced that the route to truly effective agreements on arms control will only ever be through full-fledged negotiations and the search for consensus decisions.

I wish you all success in your work and hope that we can overcome the problems that are currently obstructing the activities of this vital international forum.

The President: Please allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort Mr. Lavrov from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Gholamhossein Dehghani, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): Madam President, distinguished delegates, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament. First, let me congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Conference.

Today, I will limit my remarks mostly to the extreme risks of nuclear weapons. On a number of occasions in recent months, including in his address to the Conference on Disarmament last Monday, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has warned that “global anxieties about nuclear weapons are the highest since the cold war”. We share this factual and well-grounded assessment. The same anxieties induced the overwhelming

majority of States to negotiate and conclude a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons in July 2017 in the absence of the nuclear-weapon States. For the same concerns, the Nobel Committee awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize to the international campaign to abolish nuclear weapons for its work in drawing attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its groundbreaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons. Due to the same anxieties and in order to highlight them, the science and security board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists decided last January to move their doomsday clock, an analogy for the threat of global nuclear war, 30 seconds closer to midnight – that is, the end of humanity.

There is some background to these anxieties and concerns. The continued failure of the nuclear-weapon States to meet their legal obligations under article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – to negotiate nuclear disarmament – has created a crisis of confidence in the capacity and ability of the Treaty to deliver its promise of nuclear disarmament and has put the Treaty under great stress. While there is no progress in the direction of nuclear disarmament, the nuclear-weapon States are making fast progress in the opposite direction by extensive investment in the modernization of their nuclear forces and developing newer and more effective nuclear warheads. For instance, the United States has announced its plans to spend US\$ 1.25 trillion over the next 30 years to replace and upgrade its nuclear arsenal. So, a new round of the nuclear arms race is in progress. This is a matter of serious concern. The role and significance of nuclear weapons in security and military policies and doctrines of the nuclear-weapon States have increased dangerously. Recently, the head of a nuclear-weapon State publicly and irresponsibly boasted that his nuclear button is much bigger than that of others. We must not forget that reckless policies and statements emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantor of security, coupled with the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament, inevitably have unintended consequences, including encouraging the proliferation of nuclear weapons and raising the possibility of nuclear confrontation and war. This is evident when we look at the growing dangers on the Korean Peninsula.

The root cause of this state of affairs is the lack of political will to abandon doctrines of nuclear deterrence and the balance of nuclear terror. The “haves” must come to terms with the crucial reality: we live in a globalized security environment. The dangerous and erroneous security paradigm of the cold war era that is premised on a polarizing world divided into two distinct camps – one without nuclear weapons and the other equipped with or protected by nuclear weapons and concerned only with its own security at the expense of the others – is no longer tolerable. Categorizing States as nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States does not reflect the broad process of collective stigmatization of nuclear weapons as weapons of horror, their status as a category of weapons of mass destruction and the significant threat they pose to international security.

The possession of nuclear weapons should be stigmatized as unacceptable and immoral in order to encourage collective efforts aimed at their total elimination. The stigmatization of nuclear weapons does not separate rule-setting from the social context. Accordingly, the international community, based on the accumulated history and nature of these weapons, has stigmatized research and development in the area of nuclear weapons. For our part, the stigma of nuclear weapons is deepened by religious teaching, which rules out taking pride in nuclear weapons. Quite the opposite. The religious decree issued by our Supreme Leader forbids the production, possession, use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as illegitimate, futile, harmful and dangerous, and as a great sin.

In a globalized security system, nuclear weapons, as the most monstrous tools of mass destruction, must be totally eliminated because, by their very existence, they undermine the Charter-based principle of equal rights of all States to peace and security – the most fundamental human rights and the very foundations of international humanitarian law.

The Conference on Disarmament must respond to global anxieties about nuclear weapons and to the fact that an overwhelming majority of United Nations Member States, supported by international public opinion, want an end to the threat of nuclear weapons. In the light of the worsening security situation in North-East Asia, the abolition of nuclear weapons is more important than ever. Any use of nuclear weapons will have catastrophic

humanitarian consequences. It is only through their total elimination that we have a real guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again and that the tragedies of the past will not be repeated.

The Conference on Disarmament is the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the whole international community. The Conference and its predecessors have made a valuable contribution to the search for a world free from the threat of weapons of mass destruction. However, since 1996, the Conference has taken no step forward in negotiating on nuclear disarmament. This lack of progress is frustrating. To preserve its function and relevance, the Conference must play a leading role in the multilateral work of building a world free of nuclear weapons. It should commence negotiations on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons.

Nuclear-weapon States seem to believe that they have secured the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and that they no longer need to bother to convince the non-nuclear-weapon States. Such a calculation undermines the validity and integrity of the Treaty. The decision last week to establish various subsidiary bodies aimed at promoting understanding and deepening technical discussion on several agenda items will pave the way for a balanced and comprehensive programme of work. To that end, we must all be prepared to work hard and constructively to overcome the long impasse of two decades in the Conference.

As a steadfast supporter of nuclear disarmament, Iran has a strong interest in and commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Its policy is based on rational, legal and religious grounds. On such a solid basis, Iran is party to all international agreements governing weapons of mass destruction and has been at the forefront of efforts to extend the universality of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to the Middle East. Since 1974, Iran has been promoting a proposal to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. However, the Israeli regime, the only non-party to the Treaty in the Middle East, continues to block all international and regional efforts to realize that goal. Nuclear weapons in the hands of this regime, which has a long and dark record of aggression, occupation and war crimes, pose a serious threat to the security of non-nuclear-weapon States in the Middle East. Israel's nuclear weapons programme is the result of the application of double standards by certain nuclear-weapon States, in particular the United States, and their failure to abide by the very non-proliferation norm which they are legally committed to comply with and which they invariably enforce. We have consistently urged that the non-proliferation norm should be applied globally and without exception.

My country's persistent commitment and contribution to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation did not end even when a fabricated crisis inflicted here created trouble for my country a few years ago. We were able to move beyond that unnecessary crisis through painstaking negotiations, which resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a historic success of multilateral diplomacy. The great benefits of the Plan of Action for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the non-proliferation regime, as a model of how to resolve technically and politically complex issues, have been widely acknowledged. That is why the international community has been steadfast in its support of the implementation of the Plan. While Iran has fully implemented its commitments under the Plan during the past two years, as confirmed by 10 consecutive International Atomic Energy Agency reports, the United States, a participant in the Plan of Action, has repeatedly violated its commitments under the deal by adopting policies, taking actions and also making negative statements aimed at depriving Iran of the benefits of the deal. It is unacceptable to hold the Plan hostage by linking it to unrelated issues and threatening to withdraw from it. One party has threatened to abandon the Plan unless it is renegotiated. Our response to that threat is clear and firm: No, the Plan will not be renegotiated. The position of the United States on the Plan sends an important message that the United States is not a reliable party in any bilateral or multilateral agreement.

We have a common interest in supporting the cause of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, because it contributes to our security and the security of generations to come. To succeed, we must all support efforts aimed at taking forward this cause multilaterally. This Conference should play a leading role in this regard by fulfilling its

mandate. I hope to see new progress in the Conference towards achieving the nuclear disarmament goal, and wish it the best for a successful session.

The President: Please allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort Mr. Dehghani from the Council Chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. George Ciamba, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Ciamba (Romania): First, allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and to pledge my country's full support for your work. I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the intense efforts made by your predecessor, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka. Moreover, I wish all six member States that will occupy the presidency this session every success in advancing the work of the Conference this year. With the understanding that Romania shares the assessments in your statement, allow me to highlight a few issues of particular importance to my country.

It is our fundamental belief that the Conference on Disarmament remains the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community in the field of disarmament and arms control, with the fundamental principle of consensus among members. The Conference on Disarmament has a track record of negotiating landmark disarmament agreements and is still capable of attaining many more goals. This negotiating role must be preserved and reinforced. We all have a vital interest in achieving success in disarmament negotiations and it is high time to overcome the long-standing deadlock and resume substantive work in the Conference. For sure, disarmament negotiations cannot provide answers and miraculous solutions to all our concerns, but without a clear and strong political will of the entire membership of the Conference, we risk the very credibility of our engagement and determination to obtain concrete results. In this sense, there is no need to remind ourselves what is at stake. The security concerns are real, and we must take into account the current international environment.

Romania finds itself in a changing environment and at a crossroads of strategic challenges. Therefore, we have a national interest in consolidating our security through dialogue and cooperation. This delegation continues to acknowledge the value of the Conference on Disarmament to international peace and security and supports the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work with a negotiating mandate. Such a programme of work is not an end in itself but a tool that should enable the Conference to fulfil its mission as the single multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. Romania is committed to working closely with all delegations to this end. It was in this spirit that our delegation proposed last year the establishment of the working group on the way ahead, which aims to find the common ground needed to move on. I would like to take this opportunity to commend you all for the decision adopted on 16 February 2018 to take forward our work on establishing subsidiary bodies to the Conference on Disarmament. We should keep this momentum and maintain a realistic and pragmatic approach to broaden the area of convergence, building on the work done so far, and to prepare the grounds for future negotiations.

Political will is essential if we are to make steady progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty community shares responsibility for reinforcing the global nuclear non-proliferation regime – and, in particular, for overcoming the challenges posed by countries that have violated the international non-proliferation regime. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the best way to work towards a world without nuclear weapons, but there are no short cuts in this process. Any effort on nuclear disarmament must be addressed collectively in an appropriate step-by-step manner, in accordance with the security challenges and treaty commitments of all States parties to the Treaty, based on a series of concrete actions and effective steps in the interest of all concerned. The only way forward is to define goals that are more manageable and avoid unrealistic expectations that put the non-proliferation regime at risk, undermine the credibility of the Treaty and, ultimately, jeopardize the shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Together, we should be able to manage properly the current review cycle, acknowledging areas of implementation of the Treaty. In brief, a successful preparatory committee for the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, to be held in Geneva, requires taking honest stock of the progress made and using this evaluation as a basis for tangible follow-up steps. We should advance with the implementation of the 2010 action plan to make further progress in achieving the objectives of the Treaty. In the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty in 2020, we must display an inclusive and progressive approach based on concrete and fully verifiable measures of nuclear disarmament. Only by concentrating on the initiatives that build consensus and shape the needed trust and confidence among all States can we deliver concrete and tangible results that could contribute to a sustainable nuclear disarmament process.

Instead of taking different paths, we should further work with nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States alike on practical consensus-based approaches to tackle nuclear threats, such as the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty or the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty. The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a target that would be a turning point for global nuclear governance and would pave the way towards increased security for all. One can proudly note that the Treaty has become a most efficient deterrent. Nuclear explosive tests are now an anomaly carried out against an established international standard. Only one country is still testing nuclear devices in the twenty-first century, and this behaviour is unacceptable to the international community, which stands firm and united against any such breach. As stressed by the United Nations Secretary-General, even the strongest norm is no substitute for a legally binding prohibition. The current proliferation challenges have made the case for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty even more urgent.

Another logical step advocated on several occasions by the Romanian Government is to launch the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty as soon as possible, thus showing the political will of the entire membership of the Conference on Disarmament. Starting this negotiation is crucial to advancing in our common endeavour for nuclear disarmament, and it is a manageable goal that fully corresponds to our step-by-step approach.

We should make multilateralism the cornerstone of the international relations of the twenty-first century, and rule-based order should be seen as the fundament of our global security. This is why we must do our utmost to ensure the proper functioning of this Conference and the entire United Nations disarmament machinery.

To sum up, it is high time for the Conference on Disarmament to fulfil its main role and make a contribution to achieving the goal of a safer and a more secure world. Let us seize the opportunity of the Conference on Disarmament and embark with confidence, without delay, on its substantive work for the benefit of the whole international community.

The President: Please allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort Mr. Ciamba from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: It is a great pleasure for me to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Luwellyn Landers, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa.

Mr. Landers (South Africa): At the outset, Madam President, let me state unambiguously that South Africa is a strong proponent of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control and an ardent supporter of a world free from the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and the proliferation of conventional arms. While the threat to humanity posed by chemical and biological weapons has led to the banning of these weapons of mass destruction through negotiations in this very body, the achievement of a world free from nuclear weapons remains an unfulfilled and elusive goal.

My country's commitment to disarmament has never been a goal in itself. Among other things, it is based on our belief that international peace and security cannot be divorced from development – that global security is not achievable when enormous

financial and other resources continue to be diverted towards the acquisition of more and more destructive capabilities, while more than a billion people around the world continue to suffer from hunger and deprivation. We believe that common threats can only be effectively addressed through enhanced international cooperation and strong international institutions that can respond to our collective security concerns.

There can be no doubt that there is an inextricable link between disarmament and non-proliferation and that continuous and irreversible progress on both fronts is required. As the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons represents a historical bargain between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States, in terms of which the former have undertaken to eliminate their nuclear weapons based on the reciprocal undertaking by the latter not to pursue the nuclear-weapon option. Regrettably, this grand bargain has been challenged by its partners not living up to their commitments, especially under article 6.

We are convinced that neither the possession nor the pursuit of nuclear weapons can enhance international peace and security. We are particularly alarmed about statements seeking to justify the retention of nuclear weapons on the basis of the perceived benefits of nuclear deterrence. Such justifications, and the notion that nuclear weapons provide an ultimate security guarantee, weaken arguments against proliferation and the development of nuclear weapons by others, which tend to use the very same arguments to justify their decision to pursue the nuclear-weapon option. Simply put, there are no right hands for wrong weapons, and the idea of responsible possession of nuclear arms therefore has to be contested.

The primary responsibility for undertaking the necessary steps for the elimination of nuclear weapons lies with the nuclear-weapon States. It is therefore incumbent upon these States to engage, without further delay, in an accelerated process of negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

Madam President, as you are aware, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted on 7 July 2017 at a United Nations conference. The adoption of the Treaty through an inclusive multilateral process within the United Nations framework, which involved both States and members of civil society, is the culmination of three international conferences held between 2012 and 2014 that considered the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and their associated risks. We regret the decision by the States possessing nuclear weapons not to participate in that United Nations conference. The adoption of the Treaty by two thirds of the United Nations membership displays the moral and security concerns of the international community with regard to the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and the need for security for all.

As one of the most significant developments in the area of nuclear disarmament since 1945, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons represents the highest non-proliferation standard that any State can commit to, thereby strengthening and complementing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was also the reason why it was acknowledged by the Norwegian Nobel Committee in 2017. It also provides the opportunity for those States that are not located in nuclear-weapon-free zones to join an instrument that expresses total opposition to nuclear weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is fully consistent with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and endeavours to contribute towards fulfilling its provisions, including the obligation under article 6 to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. It neither detracts from nor adds to the safeguards regime established under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and it does not preclude the further strengthening of any safeguard regime or the additional measures that States may have already committed to or may undertake in the future. As with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, any State joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is required, as a minimum, to conclude and implement a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The United Nations conference endeavoured to ensure that the Treaty does not inadvertently create loopholes within the existing regime, while recognizing that detailed verification arrangements would need to be developed in the future, hopefully with the participation of all States.

I have to reiterate that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is not the final word on nuclear weapons, but a critical step in the evolution of the regime that would be required to achieve and eventually maintain a world without nuclear weapons. Its approach is consistent with the approach taken in the elimination of other unacceptable weapons where prohibition preceded elimination. Importantly, the Treaty does not prioritize the security interests of one State or a few States above the security interests of the international community as a whole, but rather recognizes that nuclear weapons pose a threat to all States and to all people.

South Africa was among around 50 countries that signed the Treaty when it was opened for signature on 20 September 2017 in New York, and we look forward to the prompt signature and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by all States that are committed to the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons.

The Treaty does not distract from, but rather encourages urgent progress towards, the implementation of the nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. What undermines confidence in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is the lack of the judicious implementation of article 6 and the necessary sense of urgency in fulfilling commitments. We believe that the faithful implementation of the nuclear disarmament commitments with the necessary sense of urgency will restore confidence in the regime and strengthen international peace and security.

As we prepare for the 2020 NPT Review Conference, it is imperative that we take stock of the progress made towards the implementation of all NPT provisions and the solemn commitments made in this regard. We should guard against some States that are opposed to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons using this to distract our attention from an objective assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the final documents of the 1995, 2000 and 2010 review conferences.

In this regard, we will have to assess why the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the last treaty to be negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament, 22 years ago, has still not entered into force. Given recent international developments, the importance and urgency of achieving the early entry into force of this Treaty cannot be overemphasized.

The present Conference on Disarmament session takes place against the backdrop of a number of challenges that have affected international disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts over the past few years. The continuing deadlock and inability of the Conference to deliver on its responsibility as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community must rank very high among these challenges. We regret that the recent decision adopted by the Conference once again fell short of our expectations for an end to the protracted impasse. Past repetitive activities have not brought the Conference closer to agreement on a programme of work. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the recent decision will not distract the Conference from the imperative of reaching consensus on a programme of work early during the 2018 session and starting negotiations. We have no doubt that this will require increased flexibility of all Conference on Disarmament members and a willingness to move beyond narrow interests.

In my Government's view, there are several items on the Conference's agenda that have long been ripe for negotiations, including a fissile material treaty, a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, as well as other effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. We see no reason why any or all of these issues cannot be subjected to negotiations in the Conference, especially given the complexities of each of these areas, which may take time to resolve. Neither do we believe that the conclusion of such instruments could in any way jeopardize the national security interests of any State. On the contrary, new norms in these areas can only serve to strengthen international and regional peace and security. In addition, the mere act of negotiation can also help to rebuild trust among States, something that is desperately needed.

There is an urgent moral duty for the Conference to be a working and functional platform as envisaged by the founding fathers. Collectively, members of the Conference hold the key to unlock this body's true potential, and through the Conference we can respond to the current global challenges.

The President: Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short while to escort Mr. Landers from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to invite our distinguished colleague Mr. Hussam Edin Aala, Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, to address the Conference.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, as I am taking the floor for the first time during the Swedish presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, please allow me to begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency and assuring you of our full support. Allow me also to express my appreciation to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka, whose efforts were crowned by the adoption of the decision to establish the five subsidiary bodies which, we hope, will be able to examine all the items of the agenda. Madam President, we look forward to the successful outcome of your efforts to put that decision into effect. This will be a fundamental step towards the resumption of substantive work on the basis of consensus on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that will enable the Conference to fulfil its negotiating mandate and to preserve its nature, role and mandate as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, the task with which it was entrusted at the tenth special session of the General Assembly, the first special session devoted to disarmament.

The current international environment presents the world with numerous challenges, of which the most serious today are, perhaps, the growing recourse by certain States to the option of force in international relations and the increase in belligerent rhetoric accompanied by the use or threat of use of force. That state of affairs nourishes distrust at the international level and threatens a new arms race as global military spending exceeds levels seen during the cold war. This underscores the ever more pressing need to reinstate the pivotal role of the Conference on Disarmament. The growing existential dangers facing humankind in the form of nuclear weapons and the possibility or threat of their use by nuclear States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the modernization of nuclear arsenals and the adoption of strategic doctrines that place nuclear arms at the core all stand in stark contrast to the obligations those States have under the Treaty and constitute a retreat from those same States' own nuclear disarmament obligations.

We therefore reiterate the principled position of the Syrian Arab Republic, which emphasizes the priority of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all aspects and insists that efforts aimed at achieving non-proliferation must be accompanied by parallel efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament, in order to promote international peace and security. We emphasize the need to launch negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament as a matter of urgency in order to achieve that objective. Syria supports action in the Conference on Disarmament to draft an internationally binding treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons in the context of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work for the Conference. It should take into consideration the four main issues on the agenda relating to nuclear weapons. Accordingly, it should be applicable to stockpiles of such material, which should be verifiable, and it should require the destruction of existing stockpiles of fissile material as well as any new material that has been produced.

With a view to the total elimination of nuclear weapons, Syria underscores the need for the States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that possess nuclear weapons to provide effective, universal, unconditional, non-discriminatory and legally binding security guarantees to all non-nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty, and to launch negotiations on a universal binding instrument aimed at providing such guarantees to non-nuclear-weapon States.

Syria is in favour of the Conference starting negotiations to conclude an international and legally binding treaty to prevent an arms race in outer space. In this regard,

it welcomes the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, submitted to the Conference on Disarmament by the Russian Federation and China in 2008 and updated in 2014. Alongside the main issues related to nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, Syria is particularly concerned about emerging issues such as the possession of chemical weapons and toxic substances by terrorist organizations and individuals affiliated to them, and the use thereof for military purpose. It reiterates its support for the Russian initiative to submit a draft legal instrument as a basis for negotiations within the Conference.

Madam President, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its call to make the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and looks forward to seeing the international community take concrete steps in that direction. In fact, the failure of Israel to accede to the Treaty or to open all its nuclear facilities to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), coupled with its disregard for relevant international resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly, IAEA and NPT review conferences remains a fundamental factor in the failure to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons. In that regard, the Syrian Arab Republic affirms that there is no link whatsoever between the issue of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and the peace process in the region, and it calls for the full implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which was concluded without a vote as part of a deal reached at the 1995 conference that helped to extend the Treaty indefinitely. Syria also points to the need to maintain the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference according to which the 1995 resolution on the Middle East remains in force until its goals and purposes have been achieved.

Syria wishes to express its disappointment at the failure to convene an international conference in 2102, as envisaged in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. That conference, which was to have been attended by all the countries in the Middle East, was intended to focus on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region. Following the failure of the 2015 NPT Review Conference owing to the renunciation by some States, including Treaty depositary States, of their responsibilities and obligations under the Treaty, the Syrian Arab Republic believes that the main factor for the success of the 2020 Review Conference remains the serious implementation of the resolution on the Middle East, as issued by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference. Similarly, all parties must fully abide by their obligations to achieve the goal of establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Syria also emphasizes that the establishment of such a zone is an integral part of States parties' obligations under the Treaty and calls upon all States parties to respect that obligation.

A number of speakers, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, have dwelt upon the issue of the use of chemical weapons in the context of what they call "the Syrian conflict". In that connection, I would like to reiterate the fact that Syria unreservedly condemns the use of chemical weapons or toxic chemical substances by anyone in any place at any time. The fact that terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusrah Front and others continue to obtain and use toxic chemical substances is a phenomenon of the utmost gravity, and one that calls for consensus on the best ways to combat it, while avoiding all deceit, selective considerations and narrow political goals. The Minister referred to the importance of acting to prevent the use of such weapons through comprehensive investigations. This, in turn, requires guarantees that the investigative mechanisms are in compliance with the standards set forth in the Convention. In this context, a warning needs to be raised about the dangers posed by the selective meetings being organized outside the framework of the competent international bodies and about the promotion of voluntary partnerships to create false non-proliferation regimes that target specific States and are based on a policy of imposing unilateral coercive measures. Such conduct runs counter to the Charter and methods of work of the United Nations. It also represents an attempt to circumvent the role of the competent international bodies, notably the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and to undermine the existing non-proliferation regime. We were surprised to see the Secretariat of the United Nations participating in such meetings.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the United States to exercise a right of reply.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I am obviously taking the floor to exercise my right of reply to respond to a number of things that were said here this morning and afternoon, most notably from the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.

Let me just start out by saying that this is a typical Russian statement, and you see this in a number of forums, where the Russian Federation looks to blame the United States for everything that is wrong in the world. I am surprised that the Russians have not decided to blame us for heavy snowfall there, but that could come soon. I mean I could stay here all day just going through the list of problems that Russia is causing around the world, starting with what the Russian Federation has done in eastern Ukraine, or with their little green men trying to destabilize a sovereign nation, what they have done in Crimea or what they are doing and have done in a number of western States in terms of trying to destabilize western electoral processes. The Russian Federation has vetoed at least three Security Council resolutions calling for accountability and calling for the renewal of the OPCW–United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. The list goes on, but I hope you will all bear with me – I need to respond to a number of charges that were made.

First and foremost, with regard to the New START Treaty, let me be very clear, the United States completed its reductions under this Treaty prior to the February 2018 deadline. We are in full compliance with our obligations under this Treaty, period.

With regard to the claim regarding ballistic missile defence – a claim we have heard often in this room from the representatives of the Russian Federation – ballistic missile defence enhances regional stability by countering the coercive power of ballistic missiles, and those missiles are growing in number. We have said that none of our ballistic missile deployments threatens the Russian strategic nuclear deterrent.

With regard to the chemical weapons stockpile of the United States, the United States is on track to meet our deadline for complete destruction of our chemical weapons stockpile by the end of 2023. I want to make that clear: we are on target to meet that deadline. By the way, one thing that was not mentioned by the distinguished foreign minister was that, in terms of Russia meeting its deadline to eliminate its chemical weapons stockpile, the United States contributed US\$ 1 billion towards that effort. You are welcome, Russia.

With regard to Syrian chemical weapons, for Russia to claim that the Assad regime has eliminated its chemical weapons stockpile is just absurd. Its continued denial of the Assad regime's capability in the use of chemical weapons is simply incredible. Russia needs to be on the right side of history on this issue. It is currently on the wrong side of history.

With regard to the international partnership condemning the use of chemical weapons, instead of criticizing the international partnership or groups that are trying to support efforts to hold those who use those weapons accountable, it should support these efforts rather than try to undermine them.

I will just touch briefly on nuclear sharing. This is an ancient argument. Well, I should not say ancient – it is actually a quite recent argument coming from the Russian Federation. But let us be very clear, this is stale, old rhetoric about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries not being in compliance with their article 1 obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The United States is in full compliance with its NPT obligations. Again, period.

With regard to the Russian chemical weapons and biological weapons convention proposal, the United States does not believe a new international convention is necessary and does not agree with the Russian argument that there are serious gaps in the international framework to address chemical and biological weapons terrorism. We believe negotiating such a convention will only draw attention away from the Assad regime's continued use of chemical weapons in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). Instead, we believe that it is critical that we do not delay or derail practical efforts to strengthen implementation of the existing framework in

using established mechanisms. We should continue to work on these important issues in other appropriate contexts such as the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings and Security Council resolution 1540 (2004). It is also important to support the relevant international organizations, such as OPCW, that have a clear mandate to address the chemical and biological weapons threats posed by non-State actors. So let me be very clear, if we have not been clear earlier: the United States does not support the Russian proposal.

With regard to the United States and its decision to go forward with the development of a low-yield ballistic missile, as I stated in this chamber a few weeks ago, a key element of Russia's nuclear doctrine is its policy of "escalate to de-escalate". By this, what Russia is saying is that it has the ability to, in essence, use a non-strategic nuclear weapon in a potential conflict with an adversary and convince that adversary that you have one or two choices: it is either to back down or to go strategic if you want to respond. So, that is a very dangerous policy and doctrine, and the reason the United States is developing this low-yield ballistic missile weapon is to make sure that the message is sent that that kind of a policy will not work, is dangerous and should not be tried.

With regard to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, I will just say very briefly, with regard to outer space in general, that Russia has been pursuing terrestrial-based anti-satellite weapons. We have said many times in this chamber, and I will say it again, that the proposed Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space will not command consensus in this body.

My last point – and there are other points I could have covered but I realize that others will want to take the floor – is a comment on the remarks made by the representative of Iran with regard to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. As President Trump announced in October 2017 and again in January 2018, the Administration's Iran policy takes a comprehensive approach to Iran beyond the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and we have made clear our concerns that Iran's destabilizing activities fall outside the Plan, in particular support for terrorism by regional proxies and ballistic missile activities. We continue to uphold our commitments under the Plan, including through the recent renewal of sanctions waivers on 12 January. While we do so, we will continue to hold Iran strictly accountable for its nuclear-related commitments under the Plan, and as President Trump made clear, the Administration views the Plan as a flawed deal that must be fixed. The President has requested that Congress work with the Administration to address the Plan's flaws, including through amending and strengthening the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act that addresses both the expiration of certain restrictions under the Plan and the development by Iran of ballistic missiles that undermine regional and international peace and security.

Working with our partners, the Administration is also seeking a new supplemental agreement that would impose new multilateral sanctions if Iran develops or tests long-range missiles, thwarts inspections or makes progress towards a nuclear weapon. For more information about our concerns with regard to Iran's activities, I will refer you to a recently released nuclear posture review of the United States.

The President: I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Ms. Guitton (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Madam President. I would like to take the floor following comments which have been made this morning by several speakers concerning the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which, as you know, is an initiative which was launched by France on 23 January. As we all regret, since 2012 the ban on the use of chemical weapons has been called into question by their repeated and continued use in various regions of the world. The return to a total and verifiable ban on their use is fundamental for international security, strategic stability and the internal security of States. It is not acceptable for the most successful non-proliferation regime to be called into question without those responsible suffering the consequences, and that is why the partnership was launched.

This initiative now includes 25 States, representing all regional groups of the United Nations, who have committed to making public the names of individuals and entities who

may be involved in chemical programmes or attacks, and to pooling their resources, particularly in terms of information-sharing.

The aims of the Partnership are to combat the growing acceptance of the use of chemical weapons, to dissuade anyone from using these weapons in the future, to help overcome international political deadlock and to share information and expertise, including through capacity-building in this area for Partnership members. Contrary to what may have been stated, the geographical scope of the initiative is universal. It applies to all programmes for developing chemical weapons capability and to any use of these inhuman weapons in any State by any actors.

This initiative complements the existing competent institutions. It is intended to reinforce their activity, especially at a time when this activity is unfortunately encountering difficulties as a result of well-known differences of approach within the international community. The Partnership is designed to feed into these existing and absolutely legitimate national and international mechanisms. In this way, it will contribute to consolidating the overall regime for combating the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. The multilateral institutions with a mandate to combat the proliferation and use of such weapons, in particular the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and OPCW, were included in the initiative.

In conclusion, this partnership is an initiative which, I repeat, is open to all States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention who support its aims. It is a mechanism aimed at strengthening cooperation between States and we invite all countries who share these concerns to join it.

The President: I have now on my list of speakers two more delegations that would like to exercise their right of reply. I give the floor to Ambassador Aala of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor for a second time, but I find myself obliged to do so in the face of another attempt by the representative of the United States of America to exploit the meetings of the Conference on Disarmament to forcibly introduce the subject of chemical weapons, perverting the facts and directing baseless accusations concerning the use of such weapons and the related investigations in the Syrian Arab Republic. This is part of a campaign of systematic misinformation being implemented by the United States in pursuit of political interests that threaten my country's sovereignty and its territorial unity and integrity.

I do not, of course, intend to reprise the detailed explanations given earlier or to repeat comments about the unprofessional and biased manner in which the Joint Investigative Mechanism conducted its investigations into incidents related to the use of toxic chemical substances on Syrian soil. Nor do I intend to dwell on the lack of objectivity in the Mechanism's reports or the large degree of politicization that marred its work as a result of pressure exerted by the United States to make the reports serve American interests at the expense of scientific truth and simple logic.

The scientific facts and legal explanations submitted by my Government are all in the records of the Conference on Disarmament for last year and in the minutes of meetings and other documents of the competent international body: the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The most recent of these is the document my delegation submitted to the Council two weeks ago in response to accusations and allegations relating to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Nonetheless, Madame President, please allow me to recall certain facts in this regard by way of response to the allegations and accusations in the statement of the Ambassador of the United States.

Firstly, the Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled all its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which it acceded in 2013, and it has made an unprecedented achievement in eliminating its chemical programme in record time, fully, irreversibly and in the extremely complex practical circumstances imposed by the war against foreign-funded terrorism. It should be recalled that Syria, under direct OPCW supervision, has destroyed all its installations and production equipment and has sent all its toxic chemical substances for destruction outside the country. This was reconfirmed in a statement before

the Conference last Monday by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands and former head of the OPCW–United Nations Joint Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic for the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria. It goes without saying, then, that Syria is not using any chemical weapons because, put very simply, it does not have any.

Secondly, the Syrian Arab Republic has, in its official statements – the most recent of which was my own statement before the Conference today – condemned all use of chemical weapons in the strongest possible terms. It also condemns the fraudulent allegations directed against it for political reasons and motivations of which we are only too well aware.

Thirdly, Syria has offered its full cooperation and has provided all the conditions necessary for a transparent, objective and professional investigation into the use of chemical weapons, in order to disprove the misleading allegations directed against it and to uncover those truly responsible for committing such crimes and those who trade in the blood of the Syrian people. However, a well-known group of States has hindered that investigation and applied various forms of pressure to politicize the work of the investigative team. This is because the outcome of any truly transparent and objective investigation would not serve the agenda of those States. Nor would it help to cover their own complicity with terrorist groups, which use chemical weapons in order to direct accusations against the Syrian Government and so block the progress of the Syrian Arab Army towards restoring areas overrun by the terrorist Nusra Front.

Fourthly, policies that aim to spread chaos and change regimes by force have served only to spread the phenomenon of terrorism in the world and have led to increased opportunities for terrorists to gain access to and use toxic chemical substances in their attacks. The fact that terrorist groups such as ISIL, the Nusra Front and others continue to obtain, stockpile and use toxic chemical substances is a phenomenon of the utmost gravity, and one that calls for consensus on the best ways to combat it while avoiding all deceit, selective considerations and political goals. In that regard, we believe that the draft instrument aimed at confronting the threat of biological and chemical terrorism, submitted to the Conference on Disarmament by the Russian Federation, constitutes the optimum approach for dealing with that threat.

Fifthly, achieving the purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention to establish an effective global system against chemical weapons necessarily involves efforts to universalize the Convention. That purpose cannot be achieved through selective meetings in which only a limited number of States participate and which are organized in secret outside the competent international bodies, such as the Paris meeting, or through the launch of so-called voluntary partnerships to create false non-proliferation regimes that target specific States through coercive measures that violate international law. Such alliances contradict the principle of partnership and circumvent the role of the competent international bodies, first among them OPCW, undermining their role and the existing non-proliferation regime.

Lastly, maintaining the internationally agreed non-proliferation regimes requires an end to politicization and manipulation around the use of chemical weapons in Syria, just as it requires an end to the use of double standards regarding the implementation of international obligations, in such a way as to respect the national security of States.

Before I conclude, please allow me to place on record my opposition to the persistent use of certain terms on the part of my colleague, the Ambassador of the United States, to refer to my country in a manner that is not in keeping with the rules of diplomacy or the principles of propriety.

The President: I would like to give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea so that he may exercise the right of reply.

Mr. Ju Yong Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): I am taking the floor in exercise of the right of reply to briefly respond to the reference made by one or two dignitaries in their statements this morning, which portrayed the exercise by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of its right to self-defence as a serious threat to global peace. I

had a strong impression that the points they made are based on an erroneous and one-sided perception of the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula, or else on a total ignorance of reality. Since our representative made clear the position of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on this issue in his statement yesterday, I do not want to go into detail again, but my delegation would like to highlight the following point.

The nuclear force of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea serves as a strong deterrent to any nuclear threats and reckless military provocation by a hostile State, and therefore it will never pose a threat to any country or region unless they infringe upon the sovereignty and the national security interests of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Therefore, the argument that my country's self-defence measures constitute a threat to global peace is absolutely illogical and absurd.

The President: I would like to inform members of the Conference that the interpreters have offered to stay until 1.10 p.m.: after that, there will be no interpretation. I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Yaron (Israel): As this is the first time our delegation has taken the floor during your presidency, Madam President, please allow me to convey our appreciation for the way you are conducting our deliberations. I assure you of our full support in the conduct of your duties.

I would like to reply to comments made by a few of Israel's regional neighbours: Iran, Syria and Egypt. Israel recognizes the importance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its contribution to the global non-proliferation regime and regrets that the 2015 NPT Review Conference ended without a consensus outcome document. However, blame for the Review Conference's lack of agreement on issues relating to the Middle East cannot be placed at our doorstep. Israel continues to emphasize the need for direct and sustained dialogue between all States in the region to address the broad range of security threats and challenges. Such a regional dialogue, based on a widely accepted principle of consensus, must emanate exclusively from the region and aim at addressing the concerns of all States in the region on an equal footing and in an inclusive manner. Direct contact, combined with trust and confidence-building, is an essential prerequisite for any meaningful dialogue and any attempt to create a new security paradigm in the region. While some actors in the region have claimed that a new and comprehensive security architecture can be established in the Middle East without direct engagement with Israel, without recognition of Israel's right to exist within safe and secure borders, and without reducing regional tensions or building the necessary trust and confidence among States in the region, this position is untenable and will thwart the pursuit of a safe, stable and secure Middle East. It is high time for the Arab Group to choose the road of conciliation, direct consultation and the building of trust over the road of confrontation and hostility.

The President: I would now like to give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Heidari (Islamic Republic of Iran): Madam President, I am exercising our right of reply. I would like to start with the comment that the representative of the United States made in relation to Iran. Regarding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, I do not want to repeat what was eloquently said by my Deputy Foreign Minister on the effectiveness of the Plan of Action and the non-negotiability of that deal.

On the issue of destabilizing activities of Iran, I could say that the United States has decided that its interest lies in generating and aggravating regional disputes and exacerbating conflicts and insecurity to fuel an arms race and create bigger markets for its weapons. Iran, on the other hand, has identified its regional interests with good neighbourliness and peace and stability in the highly sensitive Persian Gulf region. This is in clear contrast with the publicly stated position of the current President of the United States, who, in his election campaign, publicly considered the war between Iran and Iraq as serving the interests of the United States and, more recently, openly made his visit to the region contingent upon the sale of hundreds of billions of dollars-worth of beautiful weapons, tools of destruction that are currently being used against defenceless children and the elderly in the region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, while establishing the highest standard of stability and security at home, has provided its advisory services to the people and security forces of Iraq and Syria, playing an indispensable role in combating terrorism, thwarting the *takfiri* campaign to take over Damascus, Baghdad and Erbil, and helping uproot these groups from Iraq and Syria. The constructive role of its armed forces in combating terrorist groups – which the current United States President, President Trump, himself cited during his campaign as having been created by the United States – has been instrumental in eradicating this scourge. It is unfortunate that, instead of discarding terrorism as a tool and joining the genuine counter-terrorism efforts made by Iran, the United States continues to misportray these constructive efforts as destabilizing. I limit myself to these brief comments.

On the issue of the missile programme, we have also said many times that our missiles are only for deterrence and defence, whereas billions of dollars of military supplies are flooding in throughout the region. Why should Iran not have the right to defend itself? Iran reaffirms the inherent right of any State to acquire, manufacture, import and retain conventional arms and related parts, compounds and accumulation for its self-defence and security. Yet these are only the tip of the submerged iceberg of the security situation. Military expenditures and arms imports in the region where we live are considerable, yet some countries are criticizing Iran for a handful of missiles that are strictly designed to carry only conventional warheads and are proportionate with its security needs, and while my country's missile programme has been developed to meet its defence and security needs, it cannot and should not be seen and assessed in a vacuum.

In exercise of my right of reply to Israel, I should say that the possession of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, along with other clandestine programmes for weapons of mass destruction, by the only non-party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in the region, Israel, poses a serious threat to the stability of the entire region and international peace and security. While Israel is allowed freely to remain out of any international treaties on weapons of mass destruction, its repeated record in the constant use of inhuman weapons against civilians has further intensified the security concerns in the region. It is a matter of concern that all efforts to establish a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East have not yet succeeded due to its persistent refusal to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to place its nuclear facilities under the IAEA safeguards system. It is a matter of more concern that, despite its defiance of the demands of the international community, it enjoys the full support of some nuclear-weapon States. Why should it be that double standards, hypocrisy, selectiveness and discrimination describe the real behaviour of some major Powers towards the region? The parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are punished, while those that are outside the Treaty are rewarded generously, which resulted in the failure of the 2015 NPT Review Conference. Moreover, Israel is a sponsor of State terrorism against the Palestinian people, as well as other people in the nations of the region.

The President: I give the floor to Ambassador Wood of the United States.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I will be very brief. With regard to the comments made by the representative of Syria, it is amazing to hear a claim that the United States is distorting the facts with regard to chemical weapons used in Syria. It is just incredible to hear this. Syria has no credibility on this issue, none whatsoever, but I will say this: the regime will be held accountable for the crimes it has committed against its own people. Let there be no doubt. The last point on this: Syria says it has fulfilled all of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and that is simply absurd.

In response to the comments made by the representative of Iran, I will just say briefly that all you have to do is look at Iran's supply of weapons to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, to Hizbullah in Lebanon, and to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It is these kinds of activities that are destabilizing the region. Do not take my word for it – ask the countries of the region.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Atta (Egypt): I am terribly sorry, I had not wished to take the floor, but since my delegation was directly addressed in one of the statements here, I would like to exercise my right of reply to what was said by the representative of Israel.

The Arab Group has shown its willingness to engage Israel directly by participating in a series of consultations that were held in the review cycle between 2010 and 2015. The consultations were held in Vienna, Geneva and Glion. So the Israeli claim that we opted not to directly engage with Israel is simply unfounded.

As for Israel's right to exist, it is not clear to which country exactly this argument is directed, simply for the reason that my country has bilateral relations with Israel. I just wanted to clarify this point.

With regard to the argument that the Middle East was responsible for the failure of the 2015 NPT Review Conference, I would like to say that the fault is not only ours and that criticism should be addressed as well to the three countries that blocked the outcome document in 2015, because they claim that they blocked this document on account of the language on the Middle East. So it is not only because of us, and I would like to record this fact as well.

As for the establishment of a Middle East zone free from nuclear weapons, I would like to refer in this connection to two binding Security Council resolutions – and we usually hear the argument here in the Conference on Disarmament that Security Council resolutions are international law. We have Security Council resolution 487 (1981), which, in its operative paragraph 5, called upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency. I would also like to refer to Security Council resolution 687 (1991), which was concluded under chapter 7 of the Charter of the United Nations and recalled in its preamble the objective of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East and noted in its operative paragraph 14 that the actions to be taken by that resolution represented steps towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery.

The President: I see it is 1.10 p.m. If you wish to continue the formal meeting without interpretation, we can go on, and I can give the floor to the representative of Iran. I take it that you wish to continue the formal meeting without interpreters. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Heidari (Islamic Republic of Iran): As our language is not an official United Nations language, I will make my comment in English. In response to the right of reply of the representative of the United States, in relation to Yemen, I limit myself to this short comment, and I quote from the Iranian high authorities: the charges against Iran regarding Yemen are completely baseless. How is it possible to send weapons, especially missiles, to a country which is fully under siege – where even medical aid and foodstuffs are stopped – and which is strictly blockaded, making even humanitarian access impossible? On the issue of Yemen, I would refer the representative of the United States to a case study prepared by our Mission in New York: "Refutation of alternative evidence". I am ready to hand him a copy: in view of this case study, I think I do not need to respond further to the accusation related to Yemen.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al Ashkar (Syrian Arab Republic): I have asked for the floor to reply to what was said by the representative of the United States. I would like to just to call for an end to the manipulation of United Nations mechanisms by some Western States to fulfil a very narrow political objective. I would like to reiterate that the Syrian Government has eliminated all the chemical weapons in its possession, and we condemn in the strongest terms the use of any chemical weapons in any circumstances in any place. We are fulfilling our obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and we call again for respect for diplomatic decorum in addressing the States members of the Conference.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation): Dear colleagues, I hate to keep you here through lunch time, but since you yourselves have heard a lot that was said about us in this chamber, I have an obligation to respond.

I will not repeat what our foreign minister said: I believe that his statement speaks for itself. But I would like to draw your attention to one small simple fact, because several times – or many times – in this room, speakers have mentioned nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. The fact is that foreign minister Lavrov was the only minister from one of the five permanent members of the Security Council to address this high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament, and I believe that this is the best testimony of our real attitude towards the Conference. More than that, he broadly outlined the Russian position on many – and I would like to stress this word – “hot” topics that are met with different responses and perceptions.

To save time, I will confine my right of reply to one general comment, which is that I believe we can easily return to and discuss specific issues in detail when we get down to business in the five subsidiary bodies. At the same time, I would like to point out that the delegation that is most vocal in this chamber is impeding our common work. I was told that two candidates who were put forward to coordinate activities on the prevention of an arms race in outer space were blocked by the same delegation. I believe that this fact also speaks for itself.

The President: Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor? It does not seem to be the case. So this concludes our business for this morning and the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.