

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and fifty-eighth plenary meeting


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President: Mr. Hussan Edin Aala (Syrian Arab Republic)

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The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call to order the 1458th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Distinguished colleagues, Mr. Møller, ladies and gentlemen, since today's meeting is the first plenary of the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic, allow me first, before starting on our agenda for today, to make some introductory remarks to explain the approach that the Syrian presidency intends to take over the next four weeks. I note with appreciation the role played by the three previous Presidents, the Ambassadors of Switzerland, Sweden and Sri Lanka, and the fruitful and constructive cooperation among the six Presidents of the session through the informal cooperation mechanism, which has proven to be useful despite the differing priorities of each President. I am also pleased that the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Michael Møller, is here with us today.

The Syrian Arab Republic is honoured to be holding the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2018 for the third time since it joined the Conference in 1996. I wish to emphasize that, in its work, the Syrian presidency will be guided by the Conference's rules of procedure and by the principles of professionalism and transparency that govern the role of the presidency. We will remain open and receptive to all constructive and serious contributions and look forward to working with the members of the Conference in a fully transparent and professional manner. At the same time, it is important that member States remain committed to maintaining a positive atmosphere, in accordance with the Conference's rules of procedure, and that they focus on its mandate and role and on the issues on the agenda, while avoiding attitudes driven by political considerations, which only create tension and hinder cooperation and positive dialogue.

The Syrian Arab Republic firmly believes in the importance of the Conference on Disarmament, as it is the sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations. It is through the Conference that we may be able to achieve nuclear disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons and ensure the peaceful use of outer space as our shared human heritage. Unfortunately, negotiations at the Conference have been at a standstill for more than two decades. We are, of course, aware of the impact of the current international and regional security environment and the complex nature of the issues that fall under the Conference's remit, as well as the wide range of positions on those issues. We recognize the complexities involved in overcoming the current impasse and the difficulties in reaching a consensus on a programme of work for the Conference. However, we also believe that this reality should not preclude further serious efforts to reach an understanding on a programme of work with a negotiating mandate. The root cause of the deadlock lies not in the Conference procedures, but rather in the lack of political will to achieve its objectives.

Encouraging progress has been achieved thanks to the strenuous efforts made at the 2018 session, during which the Conference has managed to adopt two important decisions establishing five subsidiary bodies and bringing them straight into operation with a fixed schedule of work. I intend to hold consultations with the coordinators of those subsidiary bodies, which started their work within the past two weeks. I will listen to their initial assessment of the discussions, seek their views and expectations on what the priorities of the next phase of the Syrian presidency should be and assure them of my support for their work in accordance with the planned schedule.

Bearing in mind that the decision contained in document CD/2119 was without prejudice to the rules of procedure of the Conference and the responsibilities entrusted to the President under those rules to draw up the programme of work, it is my intention, in line with the responsibilities entrusted to the President by the rules of procedure, in particular rules 28 and 29, to conduct direct bilateral consultations with member States in order to produce meaningful and concrete proposals for a programme of work that will enjoy consensus. I will also consult with the representatives of the regional groups to seek their views on how the Conference should proceed. I call upon member States that have specific proposals to communicate them to the presidency. I will hold these consultations in a positive, constructive and transparent spirit. At the same time, the subsidiary bodies will continue to perform their work in accordance with their schedule. I intend to continue to hold weekly plenary meetings to allow member States to discuss their positions on the topics included on the Conference's agenda. I will also allow sufficient time for member States to participate in the work of the subsidiary bodies and in bilateral consultations. I

hope to receive your proposals and comments in this regard. I will brief the Conference during the coming period on the results of the consultations.

Turning now to today's meeting, I see that the following delegations are on the list of speakers: the United States, Australia, Belarus, Bulgaria and New Zealand. I give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Today marks a sad and shameful day in the history of this body. Simply put, it is a travesty that the Syrian regime, which continues to indiscriminately slaughter its own people with weapons banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention, should presume to preside over this body. Rather than pretend that there is any legitimacy to Syria's presidency of this body, we should all hold accountable the Syrian regime and those who enable its barbaric crimes.

The United States is outraged at Syria's actions, its blatant disregard for international obligations and its temerity in assuming the presidency of a body committed to advancing disarmament and non-proliferation. Given its demonstrated contempt for the work of this body through the repeated violation of treaties negotiated here, Syria has neither the credibility nor the moral authority to assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, the very body that negotiated the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria acceded to that treaty in 2013, clearly with no intention to comply with its obligations then or now, as it continues its possession and use of chemical weapons in barbaric acts against its own people.

The Syrian regime's history of using chemical weapons is well established and, despite sustained diplomatic efforts, has contributed to appalling human suffering since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. The horrendous chemical weapons attack in Douma on 7 April was just another tragic example of the Assad regime's defiance and utter disrespect for its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Such actions by Syria are also flagrant violations of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions, most notably United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), which requires Syria to destroy all of its chemical weapons stockpiles and cease the use of chemical weapons.

The Assad regime's actions demonstrate blatant disregard for Syria's legal obligations and threaten the long-standing global norm against the use of chemical weapons that the international community has pledged to protect. The international community needs to use all of its available tools to make it clear that we will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons anywhere by anyone. Syria's disregard for its international arms control obligations is of course not limited to its possession and use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people.

Syria's long standing non-compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement under the NPT should also be immediately disqualifying. Seven years have passed since the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors found Syria to be in non-compliance with its safeguards agreement for its clandestine construction of an undeclared plutonium production reactor. Since that time, Syria has ignored the calls of the IAEA Director General and Board to cooperate with the Agency to remedy its ongoing non-compliance. Rather than address these issues constructively, Syria has sought to actively obstruct the IAEA investigation and to discredit the Agency's well-founded technical assessments. Syria's obstructionist behaviour and blatant non-compliance is not befitting of any State serving as the President of this body.

Let me be clear, we cannot permit business as usual in the Conference on Disarmament while Syria presides over this body. We cannot turn a blind eye toward the presidency of a regime that stands for everything this body was conceived to prevent. Our attendance today does not signify any support or endorsement of Syria's credentials or credibility in the role of President. In fact, it represents the opposite. We cannot sit back and allow Syria's presidency to proceed unchallenged or acquiesce to routine operation of the Conference under Syria's leadership. We have too much respect for the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as an institution to allow that to happen. During the next four weeks, we will be present in this hall to ensure that Syria is not able to advance initiatives that run counter to the interests of the United States, but we will fundamentally alter the

nature of our presence in the plenaries. The United States will also not attend any informal meetings that the Syrian presidency may decide to convene. Moreover, the United States delegation will not attend any of the Conference's subsidiary body discussions during Syria's presidency. We look forward to resuming normal participation in all Conference meetings following the end of Syria's presidency.

We encourage others to join us to express their outrage at Syria's actions and their objections to the Syrian regime presiding over the Conference on Disarmament and to work with us to increase the political pressure to hold the perpetrators accountable for their brutal attacks in Syria and their continued violations of international arms control and non-proliferation obligations.

Ms. Mansfield (Australia): I take the floor on behalf of Australia, Canada and Turkey to express our regret at Syria's assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We are committed to the Conference as the world's single, multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. However, our Governments feel strongly that the credibility of this body is undermined when the representative of a State which has clearly violated its international disarmament and non-proliferation obligations presides over this body.

Despite long-running and ongoing international efforts to ensure the destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapons programme, efforts to which we have contributed, independent international investigations have concluded that Syria has continued to use chemical weapons. Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons in breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention, an instrument that is one of the signature achievements of the Conference, amounts to a violation of international law, as well as a blatant contravention of the basic principles of humanity.

We wish to record our principled opposition to Syria's past and continuing actions in relation to chemical weapons use, but hope that the Conference will work constructively during this period.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The next speaker on my list is Belarus.

Mr. Ambrazevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, since this is the first meeting of the Conference to be held under your presidency, let me congratulate you on that and assure you that we support your remit and authority. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the delegation of Switzerland for organizing the work of the five subsidiary bodies, four of which have already held their first meetings.

We welcome the first results from the work of the subsidiary bodies. States have a stake in the issues of nuclear disarmament, prevention of an arms race in space and new challenges and threats. It is very important that the interests of States generally coincide with the Agenda for Disarmament of the United Nations Secretariat, announced on 24 May in Geneva by the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. As is stated in that document, the active engagement of all States, especially developing countries, in policy discussions facilitates more effective and sustainable outcomes in all areas of peace and security.

The Republic of Belarus condemns any illegal use of weapons of mass destruction. In our opinion, such actions constitute a threat to international peace and security. Allegations that weapons of mass destruction have been used are very serious and, in our view, require a rigorous and impartial investigation in every case.

It was in this very chamber that we all agreed on some of the mechanisms for investigating cases of use of weapons of mass destruction. These were duly recognized in international law, and we believe that it is necessary to preserve the authority and impartiality of the existing international legal mechanisms for investigating cases of use of weapons of mass destruction and to relieve them of the political pressure and distractions which can be created by various types of fake news. We are all too aware of the damage done to contemporary politics by fake news.

The United Nations Conference on Disarmament is not a court and does not have the authority to conduct investigations. The mandate of the Conference on Disarmament is to

develop effective measures, primarily measures of international law, in the area of international disarmament and non-proliferation, and we urge all parties to keep to the mandate of the Conference.

In this context of positive momentum, the time we have can be used productively. Adoption by the Conference of a programme of work remains a priority. We think that the time has long since come to get to the bottom of exactly what is meant by the words “balanced and comprehensive programme of work with a negotiating mandate” and attempt to reach a mutual understanding of each part of the formulation. We believe that these discussions will complement the work done by the subsidiary bodies of the Conference on Disarmament and will enable us to achieve a tangible and effective result.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Ambassador. I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria.

Ms. Kemppainen (Bulgaria): I am taking the floor on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Turkey, Montenegro and Albania, the country of the stabilization and association process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the European Free Trade Association country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union fully supports effective multilateralism and rules-based international order with the United Nations at its core. They are indispensable for ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security. Last week, in Geneva, the United Nations Secretary-General made a clear call for the universal prohibition of chemical weapons to be upheld and condemned chemical weapon attacks, as well as other attacks in violation of international humanitarian law, both deliberate and indiscriminate, against civilian populations, civilian infrastructure, hospitals and schools. The United Nations system represents moral authority and international legitimacy in a world where global rules and norms are increasingly being challenged. We continue to emphasize the importance of upholding international institutions, relevant agreements and treaties and ensuring their proper and effective functioning.

While a country that is not complying with its non-proliferation obligations should not be in a position to preside over meetings of the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, we will not allow this to inflict damage on the work of the Conference on Disarmament and its subsidiary bodies. We recall that, in accordance with rule 9 of the rules of procedure, the presidency of the Conference rotates among all its members in alphabetical order. We will continue to respect the rules and procedures of the Conference.

We must all remember that the Syrian regime bears overwhelming responsibility for prolonging the Syrian conflict, which has entered its eighth year of continuous and widespread violence with persistent and brutal violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and the confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Daesh. The conflict continues taking civilian lives every day and the Syrian regime is responsible for the catastrophic humanitarian situation and the suffering of the Syrian people. The full-scale civil war has left more than 400,000 people dead. More than 12 million people have now been displaced, including more than 5.6 million refugees hosted in neighbouring countries and 6.6 million displaced inside Syria. Nearly 13.1 million people, almost half of whom are children, urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection inside the country.

The European Union reiterates that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. Only a political solution in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) can bring peace to Syria and its people. We reiterate our strongest condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian armed forces in at least four cases, as confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. We also condemn all the cases of chemical weapons use reported by the Commission of Inquiry and the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism. We also condemn the use of chemical weapons by Daesh in at least two cases, as confirmed by the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We are concerned by continuing reports of the regime’s use of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta and other areas in Syria in recent months, including the devastating chemical attack on Douma, which

is a grave breach of international law and an affront to human decency. We express concern over the most recent report of the OPCW fact-finding mission, confirming the likely use of chlorine as a weapon in Saraqeb, Syria on 4 February this year.

Ninety years after the entry into force of the General Protocol and 25 years after the Chemical Weapons Convention was adopted by this body, we find it deeply shocking that the international community is still confronted with the use of chemical weapons. We condemn in the strongest terms any use of these abhorrent weapons, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons by anyone, be it a State or a non-State actor, anywhere and under any circumstances. We consider the Chemical Weapons Convention to be a key disarmament and non-proliferation instrument, the integrity and strict implementation of which must be fully guaranteed. In this context, the European Union fully supports the work of the OPCW fact-finding mission in continuing to investigate reports of chemical weapons use and that of the declaration assessment team in continuing its work on the gaps and discrepancies of the Syrian declarations until it is satisfied that Syria's chemical weapons programme is fully declared and irreversibly dismantled.

The European Union will continue to support the re-establishment of an independent attribution mechanism to ensure accountability for perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks. The use of chemical weapons may amount to a war crime or a crime against humanity. There can be no impunity, and those responsible must be held accountable. In this regard, we regret the Russian vetoes on the renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism's mandate in November 2017. The European Union is ready to continue work with partners to prevent any further use of chemical weapons and to end impunity for such use. The European Union welcomes the efforts conducted within the framework of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons in this regard. The European Union has imposed restrictive measures on Syrian high-level officials and scientists for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons and will consider further measures as appropriate.

The European Union is also concerned by the fact that Syria remains non-compliant with its safeguards agreement under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The European Union deplores Syria's lack of commitment to resolve all outstanding issues in full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and calls on Syria to sign and ratify the additional protocol to its safeguards agreement under the Treaty without delay.

Against this deplorable background, we consider it highly regrettable that the Syrian regime has to assume the presidency of the Conference even for one month. In our view, the Syrian regime does not have the necessary legitimacy to perform this function. During this period, we will focus our activity on bringing forward substantive work in the five subsidiary bodies, two of them being chaired by European Union member States. We will continue to fully participate in those bodies without downgrading the level of representation. We will reject attempts to misuse the Conference on Disarmament presidency for purposes other than technical chairing of plenary meetings.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Before I give the floor to the next speaker on my list, I would like to remind delegates that it is important that they address States by their official names and that they avoid using inappropriate or undiplomatic language in this chamber, out of respect for the credibility and mandate of the Conference. I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Donnelly (New Zealand): My delegation is taking the floor today during the first plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic. Syria's assumption of this role takes place only pursuant to rule 9 of the Conference's rules of procedure and reflects the monthly rotation among members of the Conference, begun in January 1979.

New Zealand's support for multilateral rules of procedure is part and parcel of our support for global rules and norms and our complete condemnation of those who flout them. We again call on Syria to meet fully all the rules of international law and especially, in the current circumstances, of international humanitarian law. We condemn in the strongest terms the gross and systematic violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons.

The Syrian conflict continues to be characterized by a total disregard for civilian lives. The continued attacks on medical units and medical personnel are serious violations of international humanitarian law. We call for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), as well, of course, as full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In recent years, New Zealand has made plain its concern that the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to live up to its mandate to negotiate multilateral disarmament agreements and has not therefore for a number of decades now met the international community's expectations of it. New Zealand would be the first to support and welcome any change to the Conference's rules of procedure which was able to facilitate the Conference being able to get down to work in accordance with its mandate. However, we are not aware that any change to the rules is under consideration at present. Accordingly, as part of our general support for the ordered conduct of multilateral business, New Zealand will continue to fully respect the Conference's rules of procedure, including its monthly rotation of presidency. We do so as part of our strong and long-standing support for multilateralism and for the search for multilateral solutions to global problems.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom supports the statements made by Bulgaria on behalf of the European Union. I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity, many of which will echo those just made in the statement by our United States colleague.

We have seen time and again instances of Syria repeatedly flouting international non-proliferation and disarmament treaties and norms that it is committed to uphold and which are vital to keeping us all safe. Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons over the course of the seven-year conflict is well documented. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism has confirmed that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on at least four occasions, including the sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. The OPCW fact-finding mission has also found that chemical weapons were used in Lataminah in March 2017 and Saraqeb in February this year. We condemn Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons against its own people, including the latest barbaric attack in Douma, following which the United Kingdom acted with our American and French allies, seeking to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people by degrading the regime's chemical weapons capability and deterring their use.

And the findings of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team could not be clearer: serious gaps and omissions remain in Syria's declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention. This flagrant disregard for international commitments is mirrored in Syria's record on nuclear non-proliferation. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) technical assessment of the Dair Alzour facility clearly and comprehensively detailed Syria's non-compliance with the safeguard agreements under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Repeated calls by the IAEA Director General for Syrian cooperation remain unanswered. As a result, outstanding safeguarding questions regarding the Dair Alzour site and three other locations remain. Syria's continued non-compliance with its safeguards agreement and attempts to disregard its safeguards obligations undermine the very principles of this Conference.

The erosion of global norms, particularly in regard to nuclear and chemical disarmament, is a deeply worrying trend that threatens every State, nation and people. It is therefore a travesty that Syria has assumed the presidency of this body. The United Kingdom will not allow Syria to inflict damage on the work of the Conference on Disarmament and its subsidiary bodies. The work of this Conference is too important to global stability for us to allow Syria to pursue its own agenda. We will continue to work tirelessly to hold those responsible for breaches of international norms and agreements to account and to uphold and defend the global consensus that chemical weapons should not be used.

In this context, no member of this delegation will meet bilaterally with the representatives of a regime that has committed such acts of barbarism and who repeatedly mocks the rules-based international system of which this body is a part.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of France.

Mr. Riquet (France) (*spoke in French*): Distinguished colleagues, France fully aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I would also like to make a few additional remarks in a national capacity.

The Conference on Disarmament finds itself today in a very peculiar situation which we can only deplore. In accordance with the rules of procedure for this chamber, today and for the next four weeks, its presidency falls to the representative of the Syrian regime. Since the start of the Syrian conflict, the repeated violations of international law perpetrated by this regime, including of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, along with multiple breaches of disarmament and arms control instruments, particularly the repeated violation of the ban on using chemical weapons, all contribute to an indisputable conclusion. The Syrian regime does not have the moral authority or the political legitimacy required to exercise the presidency of a forum such as the Conference on Disarmament. This conclusion is shared by many delegations, as demonstrated by the statements of the European Union, the Ambassador of the United States of America and several other speakers.

Distinguished colleagues, despite this deplorable situation, France remains deeply attached to multilateralism and the proper functioning of international institutions. In this context, France will continue to comply with the provisions of the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure and specifically with rule 9 on its presidency. Nonetheless, in order to express its disapproval of this situation, France will not be represented by its Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament at the plenary sessions in this chamber over the next four weeks. It will still be fully represented in the subsidiary bodies presided over by other delegations. France will be particularly vigilant in ensuring that the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament continues to be exercised throughout the next four weeks with the rigour, neutrality and impartiality which that office requires. In particular, we will make sure that the presidency is not hijacked for the purpose of disinformation or political manipulation.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you. I now give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, let me first congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of the Conference. I am confident that your rich experience in diplomacy will lead the work of the Conference to new breakthroughs; the Chinese delegation will fully support your work. I should at this point also like to express my appreciation for the efforts of your predecessor, Ambassador Dallafrina of Switzerland, for her positive efforts to advance the work of the subsidiary bodies of the Conference and for the significant progress she achieved.

In recent years, Syria has experienced the serious challenges of long-term social unrest and rampant terrorism; the people of Syria have suffered deeply, and we express our deep sympathy for that. Recently, we have been gratified to see that, with the joint efforts of all parties, significant progress has been made in the fight against terrorism in Syria, and relevant political processes are also actively advancing. China is ready to work with the international community to actively support Syria in achieving peace and stability through an inclusive political process. It is hoped that stability will be restored in the lives of the Syrian people, and that their homeland will be rebuilt as soon as possible.

China has consistently advocated and actively promoted the democratization of international relations, and is committed to upholding a rule-based international order. The rules of procedure of the Conference have been amended several times since its establishment, but the rule that the presidency rotates among member States has remained unchanged. Historically, the rotating-presidency approach adopted by the Conference was originally intended to avoid needless disputes among the parties over the selection of

Presidents. This practice has in fact proven wise and feasible. China believes that the presidency of the Conference is a non-political post, and that it should be respected and supported equally by all parties regardless of which country's representative holds that position in rotation.

On the issue of chemical weapons, China has repeatedly stated its position in that regard. China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or individual, under any circumstances and for any purpose. In cases where the use of chemical weapons is suspected, China supports comprehensive, impartial and objective investigations, carried out using scientific methods and based on conclusive and robust evidence, producing conclusions that can withstand historical and factual scrutiny. All parties must refrain from predicting results and drawing arbitrary conclusions until such investigations have been effected.

Mr. President, following the second part of this year's session of the Conference, the five newly established subsidiary bodies have officially started their work, with frank and in-depth exchanges of views on important issues of concern to all parties, and are showing good momentum. I am confident that, under your leadership, discussions within the framework of the subsidiary bodies will make further progress. At the same time, we hope that you will seize upon the favourable momentum accumulated in the discussions of the subsidiary bodies, work actively, encourage all parties to move forward together, and make efforts to achieve a comprehensive and balanced programme of work at an early date.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Ambassador, for your statement and for your kind words about me and my country. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Ms. Kuznetsova (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I wish to express my appreciation for the Swiss presidency. We commend the sustained efforts of Ambassador Sabrina Dallafior and her colleagues, which made it possible to adopt the important decision allowing the practical work of the Conference subsidiary bodies to begin. We note the high level of professionalism among the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies and the dedicated commitment of the delegations to achieving concrete results. Without wishing to pre-empt the outcome, we hope for the development of a substantive and thorough debate on all items of the Conference on Disarmament agenda with a focus on broadening the areas of common interest. We believe that this objective is completely achievable, provided of course that the delegations show the necessary perseverance.

Secondly, we hope that, along with the thematic discussions, the new Syrian presidency will devote the necessary attention to finding the best way of establishing a comprehensive and balanced programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament, considering past experience. We support the intention of the presidency to work towards this goal with the parties to the Conference and will provide all possible assistance. Furthermore, acknowledging the special role of the presidency in this process, as defined in the rules of procedure, we would like to stress that agreement on a programme of work is our shared priority, requiring the participation of all delegations. The Russian delegation has not only participated in collective efforts to find mutually acceptable solutions but has also made a practical contribution to this process. We remain ready to continue that.

We hope that, among the other legacies built up by many years of work in the Conference on Disarmament, the President will find our contributions useful in his efforts to find options for a balanced programme of work. The most recent contribution, proposed during Russia's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament last year is document CD/WP.600, combining work on two subjects: nuclear disarmament and terrorism using weapons of mass destruction.

A few years before that, as a temporary compromise decision until it was possible to achieve something more substantial, we proposed that the delegations to the Conference on Disarmament should agree on a so-called simplified programme of work, which would have provided for discussion mandates on all the key items on the Conference agenda. In a sense, the outcome the Conference has arrived at, in the form of last year's working group on the way ahead and the current discussions in the subsidiary bodies, could be considered a continuation of the same idea. Russia is not claiming copyright on any of these ideas.

They remain on the table at the Conference and, in our view, can still play a useful role in the search for mutually acceptable solutions.

At the same time, we repeat our call on all delegations represented at the Conference to refrain from turning it into a platform for politicized showdowns concerning delicate issues of a primarily regional nature and not directly related to its agenda. Such acts not only do not help in establishing the productive functioning of our forum, but actually poison the atmosphere of the mutual relations between its parties. In any event, the Conference on Disarmament cannot make a contribution to solving this type of global problem due to the specificity of its mandate. There are other bodies for that purpose, for example, the United Nations Security Council.

In conclusion, I would once again like to wish every success to the new presidency of the Conference and reaffirm our focus on constructive cooperation with the presidency, the six Presidents of the 2018 session and all the delegations in resolving our common challenge of returning the Conference to substantive negotiation work.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation for her statement and for her kind words regarding this presidency. I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Ono (Japan): Mr. President, Japan is of the view that the use of chemical weapons by any persons in any case should not be permitted and condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In this regard, Japan expresses concern again over Syria's violation of disarmament and non-proliferation obligations as it assumes the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. On the other hand, as Japan noted in its statement during the first plenary session of the Conference this year, all 65 member States have a duty and a unique responsibility to concretely advance nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Mr. President, in order to move the Conference on Disarmament forward in general, an agreement on and implementation of the programme of work is important. For that purpose, Japan places importance on the current discussions in the subsidiary bodies. It is important for member States to proceed fairly and constructively in discussions under transparent guidance, in accordance with Conference rules. Based on this point, Japan expects Syria to serve as President in a fair and constructive manner, and Japan will participate in the discussions accordingly.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of Japan for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Han Tae-song (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me at the outset to express my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and I wish you every success in your endeavour. I am confident that your rich experience and profound knowledge will guide us toward more substantive discussion in upcoming sessions of the subsidiary bodies. You can count on my delegation's full support and cooperation in this regard. Since the President of the Conference is tasked with establishing a programme of work, it is our expectation that you will devote all your efforts to producing a comprehensive and balanced programme of work agreeable to all member States of the Conference.

After the declaration by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of its decision to discontinue nuclear tests in April, a ceremony for the complete dismantling of its nuclear test site took place on 24 May in order to ensure the transparency of its commitment. The whole process was conducted with a high level of transparency in the presence of local and foreign reporters, which clearly demonstrated once more the proactive and peace-loving efforts of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to achieve peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as well as in the world. Discontinuation of nuclear tests is an important process towards global nuclear disarmament. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to make efforts to contribute to building a nuclear-free peaceful world.

Mr. President, my delegation firmly believes that Syria's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament fully accords with the rules of procedure of the Conference, which stipulate that the presidency of the Conference shall rotate among all its members based on the English alphabetical list of membership. Any attempt to alter the order of rotation or to block an individual member State from taking the presidency based on political motivation should never be tolerated. Making trouble with technical issues that have no relevance to substantive discussion will further exacerbate confrontation in the Conference on Disarmament, where there are already conflicting views among member States.

My delegation strongly opposes such examples as expressed by some countries in a bid to politicize this forum in pursuance of their egotistic interests. These countries would be better advised to reconsider their behaviour, which lays artificial barriers that divert our focus of discussion away from global disarmament.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement and for his kind words and expression of support regarding this presidency. I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Heidari (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, as this is the first time my delegation is taking the floor under your presidency, we would like at the outset to sincerely congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We would also like to express our gratitude for the work of your predecessors, namely, the distinguished Ambassadors of Sri Lanka, Sweden and Switzerland, for all their hard work in bringing the Conference to substantive work this year.

Mr. President, the establishment of subsidiary bodies of the Conference pursuant to the decision contained in document CD/2119 and the follow-up decision, in line with which five coordinators for subsidiary bodies were elected and started their work, was a turning point, allowing the Conference to engage in substantive work this year. The decision to establish subsidiary bodies for four core Conference agenda items, as well as other agenda items, was the result of a collective compromise by Conference members, who showed their political will after intensive deliberations hammered out by this year's first president of the Conference.

My country supported that decision so as to create a new opportunity for in-depth and technical deliberation of Conference agenda issues, in particular of the long-awaited issue of nuclear disarmament and the prospects for the negotiation of a legally binding instrument consistent with the Conference's *raison d'être* in accordance with its constitution, namely the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. We appreciate the hard work of all the coordinators in the first round of meetings of each subsidiary body.

We reaffirm our position of principle, which is shared by the Group of 21, that nuclear disarmament remains a high priority for us. In this connection, the Islamic Republic of Iran firmly believes that the urgent commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament aimed at the early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons, to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction, is the only practical way of and the best concrete effective legal framework for achieving and maintaining a nuclear-weapon-free world. Consequently, scattered and delayed measures with long intervals, such as fulfilment of the long awaited commitments on nuclear disarmament, have not had the necessary effectiveness or requisite speed to eradicate the spectre and threat of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, as we continue our deliberations in the five subsidiary bodies with their timetable, document CD/2119 also indicates that the work of the subsidiary bodies is without prejudice to the rules of procedure of the Conference and the responsibilities entrusted to the President, in particular rule 29 on drawing up the programme of work of the Conference. In that regard, we are of the view that the President's consultations in view of drawing up a programme of work should continue. Therefore, we are confident that continued, open and transparent consultation under your able presidency could pave the

way for the consensual adoption of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work of the Conference. We pay tribute to your best efforts and intentions, and in particular your esteemed country's pledge, as a member of the Group of 21, to make every effort to see the adoption of the programme of work for the 2018 session of the Conference.

Mr. President, we are ready to consider your proposal for a programme of work with an open mind and much interest. It is worth mentioning that any proposal that takes a balanced approach in addressing the four core agenda items, including nuclear disarmament, which has been the constant position of all members of the Group of 21 as long as the Conference has been in existence, will be carefully analysed by our delegation. Of course, we are aware that it is not an easy task for the President to put forward a proposal encompassing many ideas and views that will meet with consensus. However, given the intricacy of the programme of work of the Conference, we value your best efforts in exercising your responsibility as the fourth President of the Conference for this session of 2018. Mr. President, we fully support you in all your endeavours during your presidency.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement, his kind words and his willingness to support the efforts of the Syrian presidency. I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Abbas (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you personally as well as your country on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I also wish to thank your predecessors for their dedicated action in presiding over the Conference. I assure you and the group of six Presidents of the 2018 session of my delegation's support and its full cooperation with you in the performance of your duties.

Mr. President, as everyone knows, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable for a number of years to discharge its negotiating mandate, despite the many challenges facing the international community. The resulting gridlock has had an adverse impact on multilateralism and on the objective for which this body was established. Accordingly, we have no choice but to continue pursuing our goals of achieving peace and bringing about the total elimination of weapons. We listened to your statement, Mr. President, and we support your endeavour to explore alternatives conducive to a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that addresses the concerns of member States, since effective action to end the stalemate faced by the Conference has become extremely urgent.

Everyone knows that this Conference does not operate in a vacuum, but is closely connected with the international security environment. The challenges to international security actually serve as an incentive for exploring alternatives and moving forward with the disarmament process, which requires audacity, flexibility and the will to find compromise solutions and to avoid politicization of the Conference. While responsibility for submitting the programme of action lies with the President, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Conference, it is also a collective responsibility of all member States. We hope that the Conference will not drift away yet again from its normal course. We therefore reiterate, Mr. President, our support and cooperation.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of the Republic of Iraq for his statement, his kind words regarding me and my country and his readiness to support this presidency. I thank you in particular for reminding the Conference that, for it to be successful, States must make sincere and constructive collective efforts to achieve the Conference's goals. I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lee Jang-keun (Republic of Korea): First of all, my delegation would like to express our satisfaction that four out of five subsidiary bodies have held substantive discussions during the past two weeks, in accordance with the timetable contained in document CD/2116.

The presentations by the experts from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, followed by an exchange of views, not only enhanced our understanding of where we are but also helped us to re-identify differences as well as commonalities among

us on the issues under consideration. We could also sense a shared awareness of the much-needed progress towards restoring the authority of the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral disarmament negotiation forum.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to commend the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies on the successful start of their work and would also like to reaffirm my full support for their endeavours.

Over the past weeks, as well as today, many delegations have spoken about the issues related to Syria. My delegation joins previous speakers in expressing our deep concerns about the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria, particularly by the Syrian armed forces, as investigated by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. In this regard, I wish to echo the remarks made by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, at the University of Geneva last week, in his speech launching his disarmament agenda. I quote: “We will also take steps to end and prevent the use of other weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical weapons” and “We cannot allow continued impunity in Syria or elsewhere.” He also made a commitment to, and I quote: “establish a core standing mechanism to conduct investigations into any alleged use of these weapons”. As a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, begotten by this august body, the Republic of Korea supports the Secretary-General’s remarks.

My Government unequivocally condemns any use of chemical weapons, anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances and affirms that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. Otherwise, the repeated use of chemical weapons with no accountability will cast a long shadow on the normative value of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Republic of Korea fully supports the international community’s efforts against the use of chemical weapons, in particular, to prevent them causing innocent civilian casualties.

Finally, my delegation would like to emphasize the importance of universal adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention and would urge those States who are not yet parties to adhere to it as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of the Republic of Korea, and I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Raz Shechter (Israel): Israel values the Conference on Disarmament, an international body that, like the Security Council, has the capacity to contribute to global security and stability in the face of the growing armed violence in the world. Especially in these times of challenges to the rules-based international order, we attach great importance to verification and compliance under existing international arms control and non-proliferation mechanisms, to include the Conference on Disarmament.

We recognize the importance of the orderly conduct of the Conference’s work as portrayed within its rules of procedure and respect the institution of the presidency based on rotation in alphabetical order, as contained therein. At the same time, although the role of the President of the Conference is a matter of formality, a president of any body, especially an international body responsible for negotiating matters related to global strategic security and weapons of mass destruction, has moral bearings on its leadership role, as well as high political visibility. Having a member State which flagrantly and repeatedly violates its own international obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention by horrendously gassing its own people and which has been reported to the Security Council by the International Atomic Energy Agency for non-compliance with its nuclear safeguards agreement is disturbing and runs counter to the objectives and principles of the Conference on Disarmament. This demands condemnation and reaction.

The absurd reality in which such a member State is now presiding over the Conference on Disarmament is unacceptable and should not be permitted to pass without implications. Business is not usual. As member States of the Conference who decide on their own rules of procedure, we have an obligation to speak out when absurdity such as this is happening. Given the actions of the Syrian Government and its destructive influence on regional and global peace and stability, accepting Syria as the President of the

Conference negatively reflects upon all of us. It undermines the integrity and the credibility of both the disarmament framework and the United Nations. A moral voice must be heard within this chamber and we should not legitimize and honour this regime. Israel therefore joins other States in sending a clear message to the Conference on Disarmament and to the international community that the four weeks of the Syrian presidency cannot and will not be accepted. Any other message would respect neither the Syrian people nor the international community. Israel, as a responsible member State that takes its commitments to the Conference seriously, has decided that, contrary what has been done in the past by other member States in this Conference, it will continue to appear at this chamber. However, Israel's seat will remain vacant, our level of representation will be lowered, we will not be involved in any substantive discussion under this deplorable presidency and our engagement will be a selective one. We hope others will join in similar actions portraying this strong, distinct and unmistakable message.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Jadoon (Pakistan): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Allow me to begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assuring you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

We take note of your opening remarks and thank you for reaching out to the regional groups and individual delegations for informal consultations. We will engage with you constructively in advancing the work of the Conference and hope that all delegations will do the same. We also take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President, the distinguished Ambassador of Switzerland, for her sterling leadership of the Conference. She steered us to a successful start of substantive work in the subsidiary bodies, building on the excellent foundation laid by her two predecessors, the distinguished Ambassadors of Sri Lanka and Sweden. We hope that this positive trend of seamless coordination and cooperation between the six Presidents will continue throughout the remainder of this year's session, ensuring the smooth conduct of the Conference's official business, and will remain unaffected despite the statements that we have heard today raising questions regarding the current President of the Conference.

It would be most unfortunate and regrettable if we allowed our political views and persuasions regarding a fellow member State to discredit the office of the Conference President. As we are all well aware, in accordance with rule 9 of our rules of procedure, the presidency of the Conference automatically rotates among all its members for a four-working-week period, based on the English alphabetical order. We are not at liberty to elect or appoint a Conference President by picking and choosing countries in accordance with our likes and dislikes. Casting aspersions on the solemn office of the Conference President and challenging its authority would have a negative effect on the smooth functioning of the Conference and set a bad precedent. Despite our differences of opinion, extending due courtesies to each other and to the rotating presidency is essential for a congenial working environment in the Conference.

Mr. President, we hope that the Conference will continue its normal routine during your presidency, functioning in a productive manner, in order to collectively advance its mandate. And you have made the right start. The Conference on Disarmament should not become a victim of our posturing and politicking on issues that are not related to its substantive agenda items. Extraneous issues should neither divert the Conference's focus from its core items nor undermine the apolitical nature of the Conference presidency.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of Pakistan for his statement and for his kind words and sentiments. I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Ms. Godin (Canada): I am taking the floor today to express Canada's profound regret that Syria has assumed the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. As the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers stated in their joint communiqué in Toronto on 23 April, we deplore the fact that Syria will assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in May, given its consistent and flagrant disregard of international non-proliferation and disarmament norms and agreements.

To be clear, the Assad regime has used chemical weapons against its own people. Syria has no legitimacy to sit in the chair and preside over this forum. Canada is deeply committed to the Conference on Disarmament, as demonstrated by Minister Freeland's speech to this body in February. However, Canada feels strongly that the credibility of the Conference is gravely undermined when the representative of a State which has clearly and repeatedly violated its international disarmament obligations presides over it. Canada has previously expressed concern about the Conference's strict rotation of the presidency, as it allows States which do not comply with their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments to nevertheless assume a role in its operation. That Syria would serve as President only reinforces our view that serious reform of the Conference on Disarmament is required. The Chemical Weapons Convention is one of the signature achievements of the Conference, yet the current President is actively and repeatedly challenging its integrity. To highlight the hypocrisy of the Syrian regime throughout June, we will also be giving our voice to the survivors of chemical attacks in Syria by sharing their testimonies.

(spoke in French):

In its latest report dating from October 2017, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism concluded that, on 4 April 2017 in Khan Shaykhun, Syrian Government forces had used an aerial bomb containing sarin gas. That was at least the fourth time that the Syrian regime was recognised as having been responsible for the use of chemical weapons. On that occasion, the Syrian armed forces used exactly the same nerve agent that they claimed to have sent outside the country for destruction. Hundreds of civilians suffered the terrible consequences.

Human Rights Watch spoke to a large number of people who had seen the horror of the effects caused by chemical weapons, for example Abdelaziz al-Youssef, who arrived in the area targeted by Syrian forces just a few minutes after the attacks, to help his relatives. He stated, and I quote: "People were trying to flee, moving into basements. But as they walked, they collapsed. And those who came to their help collapsed as well. The gas spread up to 500 or 600 metres. The victims were not only in the place that was hit. There were martyrs over the entire neighbourhood. Those who stayed asleep did not wake up. Those who were in basements suffocated and died. Those who woke up and went out were affected. I swear, those who survived can't describe what happened. It was like Judgment Day – people were collapsing everywhere."

Another witness interviewed by Human Rights Watch is Fatima Abdel-Latif al-Youssef. She lived just a few metres from the target. She said, and I quote: "My cousin went out onto the balcony. She is 16, and she was choking. I tried to help her. We poured water on her but she passed out. My aunt passed out. At that point I also passed out, but I came to later. My uncle's wife, who lives in the same building, knocked on the door of the apartment. She said, "let me in, help me!" I tried to drag her in, but I couldn't carry her because I am small and she was heavy. I left her on the floor by the door to go up to the second floor, to get my uncle to come and help me. He went down to help her, but he never came back." According to Fatima and her cousin, seven people who lived in the same house died during the Khan Shaykhun chemical weapons attack, including two children aged 7 and 10. Almost 100 innocent victims lost their lives in an atrocious fashion in Khan Shaykhun.

If that is not enough to demonstrate that is truly regrettable that Syria should preside over a multilateral United Nations body which is responsible for negotiating disarmament treaties, we would remind this assembly that the use of chemical weapons implies the possession of such weapons. A failure to declare their possession constitutes a second violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention perpetrated by Syria, more specifically its failure to have made a truthful declaration. Canada has actively participated in the efforts made by the international community to destroy the chemical weapons declared by Syria. However, throughout the years our work has been obstructed by the reluctance of Syria to cooperate with OPCW and its refusal to get rid of all its chemical weapons.

(spoke in English)

The Joint Investigative Mechanism's findings are proof, if any more was needed, of a conscious choice by Syria's senior leadership to ignore its legal obligations and flout the

global taboo against chemical weapons. The use of any chemical weapon is morally reprehensible and constitutes a war crime for which continued impunity is intolerable. Perpetrators must be held accountable. Canada condemns Syria's continued and callous disregard of international law; this cannot be ignored and must be denounced. Syria has turned its back on the very principles on which this forum stands. Put simply, Syria is manifestly unsuited to preside over the Conference. Since Syria's decision to assume the rotating function of the Conference President is unacceptable to Canada, our Permanent Representative will not participate in any plenary meetings during this presidency. Syria's disregard for international law and for the commitments that it has made takes place under the protection of Russia, which has 12 times vetoed resolutions in the Security Council, including the resolution which would have renewed the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. This protection breeds impunity and this impunity breeds contempt, and today, Syria contemptuously stands forward to preside our meeting.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Pilz (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

The international security environment is undergoing dramatic changes. Efforts aiming at arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament come increasingly under pressure. In such difficult times, we need to redouble our efforts in order to enhance trust and confidence. An organization such as the Conference on Disarmament is of exceptional relevance in this context.

It is against this backdrop that we regret that the vital task of presiding this very important organization falls upon Syria, a State not in compliance with its non-proliferation obligations; a State that bears the overwhelming responsibility for heinous violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; a State which, in violation of international law, has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own citizens.

While we accept the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, which foresee the rotation of presidencies in alphabetical order, we will not allow the situation to have a negative impact on the substantial and much needed work of this organization. We call on the presidency not to politicize its role and to execute its work according to the highest standards which prevail in this organization. Any attempt to misuse the role of the presidency for purposes other than technical chairing will be rejected by Germany and other States and followed by appropriate responses.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of Germany for the accusations made against this presidency. I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Djouama (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, my delegation would first of all like to express its sincere congratulations to you on assuming your presidency of the Conference. We are confident that, under your leadership and thanks to your professionalism, our work will continue along the right track. My delegation would also like to take the opportunity to thank your predecessors, the Permanent Representatives of Sri Lanka, Sweden and Switzerland, for their commendable efforts made during the last three presidencies.

My delegation reaffirms its commitment to working with the other members of the Conference on Disarmament so that it can resume its primary task, which is negotiating disarmament treaties. We think it is essential to encourage dialogue and cooperation within the Conference in order to foster a climate favourable to consolidating the efforts of all members towards positive progress.

Mr. President, your presidency comes at a critical time, halfway through the 2018 session, when we have begun substantive debates within the subsidiary bodies established this year. We hope that their conclusions regarding all the agenda items will bring new ideas and offer avenues for renewing the work of the Conference. For years, we have been organizing thematic debates during official or informal meetings. These meetings have been an opportunity to reiterate the respective positions of the Conference members but

without being able to reflect that content in the annual report. My delegation hopes that this year the conclusions of these debates can be negotiated, adopted by consensus and recorded in the reports. This exercise would allow the Conference on Disarmament to resume, if only at a preparatory stage, its function of negotiating on substantive issues and to prepare the technical elements for future negotiations on international instruments.

Mr. President, my delegation shares your approach of aiming to open bilateral consultations with member States and regional groups concerning the programme of work, in parallel with the work of the subsidiary groups. Be assured, Mr. President, of the full support of my delegation in your efforts and of its cooperation for the success of your presidency.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of Algeria for his statement, for his kind words regarding the presidency and for the support expressed in his statement. Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I would like to highlight an error in the interpretation following the statement by the representative of Germany. I did not thank him for his statement; rather, I thanked him for the threats that he had made, and I assured him that I would take them into account. I now give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the representative of Venezuela.

Ms. Díaz Mendoza (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. We would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of this forum in accordance with rule 9 of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our support for your work and all your endeavours in the coming weeks and to assure you of our cooperation. We appreciate the efforts made by the Presidents of the Conference during the first part of the year, and we congratulate them on having made headway towards achieving results and trying to bring the Conference on Disarmament out of its stalemate.

Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to peace and to general and complete disarmament and non-proliferation. The achievement of that goal is essential to strengthening the right to international peace and security. We reaffirm our principled stance on nuclear disarmament as the highest priority on the Conference agenda.

Mr. President, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is committed to working together to advance substantive work in this forum through constructive, transparent and participatory dialogue. The Conference on Disarmament was established in 1978 as the single multilateral negotiating forum in disarmament matters. It has become a well-suited and indispensable multilateral forum and has made significant achievements throughout history, such as the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This Conference is an essential part of the multilateral system, and it must resume its mission and adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work with a negotiating mandate that genuinely takes all disarmament-related priorities into account.

Venezuela reiterates its commitment to the existing institutions and agreements on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. We find ourselves at a difficult international juncture that requires our joint efforts to ensure international peace and security. We can no longer delay the start of substantive work. The validity, and even the relevance, of this forum will be determined by how soon we embark upon this task, and an agreement on the programme of work is the first step towards this. Our ultimate, common objective is to strengthen the international legal order on the basis of our commitment to strive for international peace and security. We must not miss the opportunity provided by this forum; we have a collective responsibility to negotiate instruments to regulate and eliminate weapons of mass destruction. We cannot remain indifferent in the face of the risk that such weapons entail and the threat to humanity that they pose.

My delegation expresses its full support for the Conference on Disarmament, the establishment and development of which were of great importance. It must find a way of regaining its rightful place on the international stage. Let us not forget the past experience of the Conference. We reaffirm the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation and reiterate our decision to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation.

The role played by nuclear-weapon-free zones in addressing non-proliferation issues and the promotion of a common regional and non-nuclear security policy are fundamentally important. Fortunately, Venezuela, Latin America and the Caribbean is a region free of nuclear weapons. We hope that all regions, including the Middle East, will soon achieve the same objectives.

We begin this second session with the task of building on the work of the five established subsidiary bodies. We hope that their endeavours will help identify elements that could serve as a basis for the preparation of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work as a negotiating mandate. We also hope that the consultation process you have outlined for us today will enable us to make further progress towards achieving that end.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to reiterate its commitment to this forum and to multilateralism. We must join together and assume our responsibility to the international community to work for international peace and security. The work of the Conference on Disarmament must be kept free of political manipulation and double standards, and we must assist the Presidents in their duties.

We take this opportunity, Mr. President, to express our support and wish you every success in your stewardship. We will endeavour to work with you and your team in an active and cooperative manner.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the representative of Venezuela for her statement and for her kind words regarding this presidency. I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Ms. Le Duc Hanh (Viet Nam): It is my pleasure to take the floor in the first plenary meeting under your presidency. Allow me to express our congratulations on your assumption of the fourth presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at this year's session.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the initial discussion in the subsidiary bodies of the Conference under the guidance of your predecessors. In the past two weeks, we have had preliminary discussions on almost every Conference agenda item. We are now looking forward to a fruitful outcome from the remaining parts of the substantive discussions, which, in our view, will narrow the gap in knowledge, mitigate misunderstanding and enhance mutual trust among countries.

While agreeing that equal time should be spent on all issues in Conference agenda items, my delegation believes that our discussion should focus on nuclear issues, which are reflected in the topics of subsidiary bodies 1, 2 and 4. Undoubtedly the most important test facing humankind today is how to eliminate the risk posed by weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, in order to save humanity – an expression that our delegation has borrowed from the speech of the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, when he launched his disarmament agenda in Geneva last week.

Viet Nam's consistent standpoint is to call for a world without nuclear weapons. We strongly support international efforts towards this noble goal, especially the historic adoption of a treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, to which Viet Nam is proud to be a signatory.

In this regard, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to inform the Conference that, on 17 May, Viet Nam deposited with the United Nations Secretary-General its instrument of ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, becoming the tenth country to ratify this instrument, and calls for the goodwill of parties who have not done so.

In conclusion, we wish you a successful presidency and I would like to take this opportunity to assure you again of our full support.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of Viet Nam for her statement and for her kind words and expression of support regarding this presidency. I now give the floor to the representative of the Argentina.

Mr. Abbenante (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you. Argentina, believing in multilateralism and diplomacy, will continue to participate in the subsidiary bodies' deliberations during your presidency. That aside, I would like to stress that Argentina renews its firm condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria against the civilian population, including children. The use of chemical weapons is a crime against humanity and a war crime. We call on all parties involved, including actors with influence in the region, to exercise utmost caution in order to avoid an escalation of tensions and to find a political solution under the auspices of the United Nations. Argentina believes that the latest chemical weapons attack in Syria should be duly investigated and the perpetrators held accountable so as to ensure that this war crime does not go unpunished. Lastly, in accordance with the principle of non-indifference and international solidarity, the international community should reiterate its strongest condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in all circumstances.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of Argentina. I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Herráiz España (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain fully endorses the statement made by the European Union and wishes to reiterate in a national capacity some of the ideas expressed. This morning, we have heard many other delegations, including that of the United States, give their views in a timely manner on the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament that begins today. We express our strong support for the international order based on the rule of law and the norms, principles and values of the United Nations. In accordance with this fundamental premise, we understand that the universal prohibition of chemical weapons constitutes one of the basic principles of humanity and international law.

My delegation believes that the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament as of today by a country that is in serious breach of its non-proliferation obligations and international humanitarian law clearly jeopardizes and casts doubt on the legitimacy and credibility of the office. Among other evidence of violations, I refer in particular to the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian armed forces on at least four occasions, as confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

My country understands, though, that the system of rotating presidencies under rule 9 of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament is an established norm and we will continue to observe it.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Ms. Pérez Álvarez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I would like to welcome Ambassador Hussan Edin Aala as he assumes, on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic, the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to wish him success in his new assignment. I would also like to thank the Ambassador of Switzerland, along with the other former Presidents, for their efforts.

Mr. President, for Cuba, the existence of nuclear weapons continues to be one of the main threats to the survival of the human species. The total elimination of such weapons is the only way to ensure that they cannot be used by States or anyone else. The majority support among the international community for the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons constitutes a milestone in the history of the United Nations on the road to general and complete disarmament. On 31 January this year, Cuba became the fifth country in the world to ratify the Treaty. We urge all countries, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to show political will and a genuine commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament by signing and ratifying the Treaty with a view to its early entry into force.

We advocate using the opportunity presented by the upcoming 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to mark a historic turning point and make real headway towards a world free of nuclear weapons. We are disappointed by the failure to implement the agreement to hold an international conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear

weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in 2012. We are hopeful that progress will be achieved on this issue at the next Review Conference.

At the same time, Cuba recognizes and takes great pride in the significant contribution of Latin America and the Caribbean to nuclear disarmament and the maintenance of international peace and security through the creation of the first densely populated nuclear-weapon-free zone on the planet under the Treaty of Tlatelolco. It was the first region to be formally declared a zone of peace at the Second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which took place in Havana, Cuba, in January 2014.

Mr. President, we hope that the United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament can be held as soon as possible, and that it will have the support of all countries that are truly committed to peace and nuclear disarmament, in order to identify ways and means of eliminating nuclear weapons in the shortest possible time and to agree on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a set period.

The Conference on Disarmament should adopt a balanced programme of work and start negotiations without delay. Lack of political will is the only obstacle to embarking on our task. We reaffirm that all States members of the Conference on Disarmament have a responsibility to achieve the adoption of a programme of work as part of our collective effort in line with the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament. We are ready to begin negotiations on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons, a treaty banning an arms race in outer space, a treaty providing effective security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States and a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices which takes stockpiles into account.

Cuba would be in favour of launching negotiations on a fissile material treaty as long as it includes a declaration of all stocks of fissile material and provides for their irreversible elimination within an agreed time frame. Negotiating such a treaty would be a positive step, yet it would fall short if there were no agreement on nuclear disarmament. At the same time, we hope that the five subsidiary bodies will contribute to the goal of establishing a programme of work and starting negotiations as soon as possible.

Finally, I would like to say that the Conference on Disarmament must be kept free of any political manipulation or double standards that might impede its substantive work, namely, the negotiation of disarmament treaties. In the light of the serious dangers that threaten humanity today, let us use multilateral solutions to put aside that which divides us and sets us against each other in order to preserve peace, the planet and the lives of future generations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative Cuba for her statement and for her kind words and expression of support. I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Gill (India): Thank you, Mr. President. As you assume your presidency under the Conference on Disarmament's rules of procedure, my delegation pledges its full cooperation to you and we hope that, under your leadership, this Conference will continue to try and live up to its billing as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. My delegation attaches high importance to this forum and the excellent work done by your predecessors, the distinguished Ambassadors of Sri Lanka, Sweden and Switzerland, which must be carried forward in the most effective manner.

Mr. President, multilateralism is never easy, and it is never tidy. Whether it is this forum or the United Nations Security Council in New York, or the Commission of Human Rights just across the building, there are always occasions when we do not like what is happening but, as in life – which also is not tidy – we have to deal with those situations. So my delegation hopes that we will continue to deal with our imperfect world with the imperfect tools and methodologies that we have at our disposal.

A number of delegations have made reference to the use of chemical weapons today. My country has maintained that the use of chemical weapons, if established to have occurred, is deplorable and the perpetrators must be brought to book. There should be no

impunity for the use of chemical weapons. It is the task of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the Hague to impartially and objectively investigate any allegation of their use and establish the facts for further action by the international community on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter and in accordance with international law, in particular the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was negotiated in this very room.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that, at this juncture, our focus in the Conference on Disarmament needs to be on deepening the first round of discussions that has taken place in the subsidiary bodies on the items on the Conference's agenda. We have done the easy part. Now we need to deepen the technical examination of issues and try to expand the areas of convergence. That will not be easy, there will be some adjustment and possible discomfort involved, but we would very much like to see the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies step up to this next stage of our deliberations. We also need to reflect on the new Agenda for Disarmament that was unveiled by the Secretary-General here in Geneva last week and see what that means for our work here in the Conference on Disarmament. And you, Mr. President, have a responsibility under the rules of procedure to continue to strive for a programme of work. I do not want to characterize it in any manner, but I think that you mentioned at the outset today that you would be conducting bilateral and other consultations; I think that is a task that must not be forgotten.

And finally, we must not forget the dignity of this forum. When I first entered this room, 24 years ago, as a young delegate, what struck me the most was its solemn and serious nature. Perhaps it is too serious at times, but I think there is a degree of solemnity and seriousness involved with work that impacts on international security, through instruments dealing with non-proliferation and disarmament. There will always be tension between our desire to see those instruments cover the greater part of the globe, in a sense be universally applicable, and our desire to see a more tidy world; that tension extends to both negotiations and implementation and to discussion of chemical weapons, matters raised by many delegations today. But, as I said at the outset, this is an imperfect world and we will have to live with that tension. What we all, the presidency and the rest of us, should try and uphold is the dignity of this forum.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the distinguished representative of India for his statement and for the sentiments expressed. I also thank him for the positive spirit of cooperation displayed, which I fully endorse. I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Claringbould (Netherlands): Mr. President, the Kingdom of the Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. Now we will make the following remarks in our national capacity.

The Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors have negotiated landmark treaties that have sought to prevent the use of atrocious weapons against humankind. Today, the rotating presidency system of this body confronts us with a regime that stands accused of disregarding the very essence that this Conference embodies. We would like to emphasize that the sole reason for our presence here today is the Netherlands' commitment to the values of multilateralism. We are here to realize our important goal of disarmament. Dialogue is crucial to this end. We must not inflict further damage on the continuation of the work in the world's foremost disarmament negotiating forum. At the same time, we want to reiterate that the Syrian regime does not have the moral authority or the credibility to exercise the presidency of the Conference. Our presence here today does not conflict in any way with our efforts to pursue justice for the Syrian people. International rights law, international humanitarian law and the Chemical Weapons Convention have been violated repeatedly and systematically in the Syrian conflict. No regime, no government, no non-State actor can violate or disregard international humanitarian law or disarmament norms. Syria is the most poignant modern example of the effects of impunity. If we cannot hold any actor accountable for its deeds, impunity will reign.

The Netherlands will continue to work with international partners to end such impunity. It might not be today or tomorrow, but the Syrian regime will be held accountable in the end. The norms this Conference and its predecessors have established

and the treaties that have been negotiated here are paramount to our security and embody the terrible lessons that war has taught us throughout history. They should be upheld by all members and we expect nothing less, especially from the presidency.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, as President of the Conference, I would like to stress that it is important that member States use appropriate diplomatic language when referring to other States and that they refrain from setting precedents that undermine the work and deliberations of the Conference. We have come to the end of the list of speakers. I understand that the representative of Germany has asked to speak a second time. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Pilz (Germany): Since my delegation was addressed directly by the presidency, I would like to exercise my right of reply.

Mr. President, in your opening statement, you referred to the need for delegates to carry out their duties and their work with a certain degree of professionalism. I would like to stick to this call and repeat some passages of my statement in order to avoid misunderstandings, since none of those passages were intended as threats to any delegation present here in this room. While we accept the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, which would see the rotation of presidencies in alphabetical order, we will not allow the situation to have a negative impact on the substantial and much needed work of this organization. We call on the presidency not to politicize its role and to execute its work according to the highest standards which prevail in this organization. Any attempt to misuse the role of the Conference presidency for purposes other than technical chairing will be rejected by Germany and other States and followed by appropriate responses. Let me also refer, as our Indian colleague did, to the dignity which prevails in this honourable chamber; and we consider that making cynical remarks from the Chair does not serve this purpose.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the representative of Germany for the clarifications provided and for insisting on the need to uphold professionalism in this chamber. I believe that your comment about not making cynical remarks applies to all delegations in this chamber. Everyone has a duty to refrain from such behaviour; first and foremost, the President, but also all members of the delegations.

As we have come to the end of the list of speakers, I would like to make a statement in my national capacity. I find myself compelled to do so in the light of the many statements that we have heard during today's meeting.

It is regrettable that the United States and its allies are continuing to exploit this negotiating forum to raise issues that fall outside the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament and to discuss sensitive matters that ought instead to be discussed in the relevant international forums, such as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), rather than being used to provoke a media response. It is even more regrettable that those States go further still, undermining the work of this forum by acting in violation of the rules of procedure and the basic principles on which they are based, in particular rules 3 and 9 governing participation in the work of the Conference and the mechanism for rotating the presidency among all member States. We cannot support attempts by these States to use false humanitarian claims to embroider positions motivated by crude political considerations, at the expense of their obligations as member States of this Conference. We cannot support the duplicity and moral selectivity with which they approach the challenges and risks posed to the international and regional security environment.

Certain States raised the issue of compliance with legal obligations; they should, however, first and foremost make sure to meet their own legal obligations under the international treaties governing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Chemical Weapons Convention and other such instruments before lecturing others. It is surprising that some are attempting to lecture others on their compliance with treaties on weapons of mass destruction while they themselves refuse to accede to those treaties, despite being the only party in the region to possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. Although certain States claim to support the chemical weapon non-proliferation regime, at the same time they appear determined to deal with suspected

incidents of chemical weapons use in a manner that ignores the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and violates the requirements for investigating such incidents and the chain of custody for samples, which are essential aspects of the non-proliferation regime under the Treaty. These States continue to pre-empt the outcome of every investigation and to make unsubstantiated accusations that they then use as a pretext to take action that is tantamount to the crime of aggression against a sovereign State, even before any impartial, independent investigations of the allegations have been carried out, as occurred following the alleged incidents at Khan Shaykhun and Douma.

There is no doubt that the international and regional security environment cannot be maintained if such behaviour is to continue, or if States insist on disrupting the efforts of the Conference to seek agreement on a convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism, at a time when there is ample evidence that terrorist groups are attempting to acquire and stockpile toxic chemicals and use them as weapons in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. I regret the miserable debate that has been pursued by some parties today in an attempt to disrupt the Syrian presidency, just as I regret the abuse of the Conference's deliberations and the insistence on raising issues that fall outside the scope of its agenda. I also regret that some delegations have been so selective in their handling of the testimonies of victims of chemical attacks in my country, taking advantage of the human suffering of those victims in such a deplorable manner.

I remain committed to moving forward, fulfilling the duties of the presidency in full compliance with the necessary standards of professionalism and transparency. I will work in a manner that respects the security concerns of all member States, guided by the rules of procedure of the Conference, and I call upon member States to respect those rules and to refrain from harmful practices and undiplomatic rhetoric, which only serve to poison the atmosphere of cooperation within this forum. This is a time when we most need to work constructively and positively in order to break the stalemate that the Conference has been suffering for more than two decades.

The negative attitude adopted by some States in their statements today raises questions about their desire to participate in multilateral action and to ensure the credibility and professionalism of this forum. Driven by an irrational fear, some States expressed assumptions about our intentions, accusing us prematurely and unrealistically of politicizing issues and targeting the interests of the United States, among others. I do not believe I made reference in my introductory statement to anything that could be construed as threatening the interests of the United States or other parties. Although I do not wish to take up too much more of your time, distinguished colleagues, a number of representatives raised issues related to the work of OPCW and IAEA. I will not go into detail in my response to those accusations, out of respect for my position as President. I refer the States in question to the statement that we delivered to this Conference on Tuesday, 22 May 2018, and to our statements before the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference, which included clarifications on and replies to the issues raised in this chamber today regarding Syria's compliance with its legal obligations.

I shall now resume my role as President of the Conference on Disarmament. I understand that the United States had asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Colleagues, let me just say that I have been heartened to hear the condemnation today of the Syrian regime in its presidency of this distinguished body. I am not going to continue with or elaborate on the comments I made in my statement this morning. I think they were very clear, but please let there be no doubt that the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against its own people is not in question, we all know that. The lies coming from the regime are fooling absolutely no one.

It is interesting that the regime is concerned about so-called poisoning of the atmosphere here in the Conference on Disarmament. I am frankly more concerned about the poisoning of the Syrian people. And for those who say that it is inappropriate to bring the issue of chemical weapons into this body, I once again remind you that the Chemical Weapons Convention was negotiated in this body and any violations of that Convention deserve to be raised in this body.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): Sir, your words are empty and you serve to underline the lack of credibility you have in your current role. Representatives of a regime that uses chemical weapons in contravention of its legal obligations and international norms can have no credibility in seeking to broker further obligations and norms in this area. Nor do you have any position to question the commitment of others.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Ambassador, out of my continued respect for the position of President, I shall refrain from responding you in my national capacity. I will now give the floor to the next speaker on my list, Bulgaria on behalf of the European Union.

Ms. Kemppainen (Bulgaria): The European Union has usually been very prudent in exercising its right of reply but there are moments at which we cannot remain silent. And the statement we have just heard from the podium only reinforces our view that a country that is not complying with its non-proliferation obligations should not be in a position to preside over Conference on Disarmament meetings and this body that is competent to address all non-proliferation and disarmament issues.

These are not just accusations or allegations. But we know that, in at least four cases, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism has confirmed the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian armed forces, and there are several more cases of chemical weapons use reported by the Commission of Inquiry and the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism.

As the European Union, we have the responsibility to raise these issues and reiterate our positions, since the 28 Ministers of the European Union member States have repeatedly condemned the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Daesh. And they have also condemned the continued systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly by the Syrian regime. This must simply end and those responsible must be held accountable. And the European Union recalls that there can be no lasting peace in Syria under the current regime.

Given all this, we continue to consider that the Syrian regime does not have the necessary credibility or legitimacy to perform the presidential functions in the Conference on Disarmament. While we continue to respect the rules of procedure, we reject any attempts to misuse the Conference presidency for purposes other than technical chairing of plenary meetings.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of France has asked to take the floor.

Mr. Riquet (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to respond to the comments that have just been made from the Chair. Before that, I will indicate that I fully align myself with the right of reply that has just been exercised on behalf of the European Union. I would just like to say that I take note of the fact that the statement made from the Chair was made by the Representative of the Syrian regime in his national capacity. However, formally, it is not acceptable for the Chair to be used for the purpose of promoting a national position. I call once again on the Representative of the Syrian regime to show the greatest possible restraint and to adhere to the principle of professionalism that he himself invoked at the start of the meeting, and also to the principles of impartiality and neutrality.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I assure the representative of France that the role of President of the Conference during this meeting has been performed with full impartiality. This meeting has been moderated in a completely professional manner. I am surprised by the representative's remarks regarding our right to make a national statement in accordance with the usual practice of the Conference and of other United Nations forums. There is no real legal justification for his comments regarding our delivering a national statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Jadoon (Pakistan): I have requested the floor to make a procedural point. My delegation respects all points of views and all opinions of all Conference on Disarmament

members. But there is one thing that we cannot agree with, and that is denying the President the opportunity to speak in a national capacity.

Unlike in other United Nations bodies and treaty bodies, where the President serves as an impartial and neutral presiding officer, with his or her own delegation represented in the room separately, in the Conference on Disarmament, the President is dual-headed: the President is the presiding officer of this body but at the same time represents his own country, which is why we do not see a separate seat for the delegation to which the President belongs. So, while respecting our political opinions and without prejudice to how we view each member State in relation to our own, from our bilateral prism, there is nothing in the Conference rules of procedure which stops a President from explaining his country's national position. In fact, it would be a usurpation of the democratic or sovereign right of that country, whichever it may be, that is occupying the Conference presidency to not be in a position to express its view. How can we expect a Conference member to be denied the right to speak? And I can recall at least one occasion in the past five years that I have been here where the Conference President, from the podium as the President, made a statement that was very substantive and very much a right-of-reply statement. And I am sure there have been other occasions in the past also. So it is important to set the record straight and not get ahead of ourselves in denying or circumscribing or reinterpreting what the President can and cannot do.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the representative of Pakistan for his statement and for the clarifications provided. I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Heidari (Islamic Republic of Iran): My statement was intentionally void of any political or polemic discussions of what the role and function of the Conference on Disarmament would be in political issues. Since reference was made to the President exercising only the technical presidency, I have examined part IV of the rules of procedure; I fail to even find this concept that was referred to. Part IV of the rules of procedure sets out how to follow the rules concerning the President. I fully subscribe to what the distinguished representative of Pakistan has said, that, if any accusation whatsoever is made against the national position of the President, the President has the right to respond. There is nothing in these rules of procedure saying that the President should exercise only the technical presidency or that, if any accusation is made against his country, he has no right to reply and should continue to exercise the technical presidency. I therefore subscribe to and fully support what Pakistan has said.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the representative of Iran. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? It appears not. This brings us to the end of our meeting today. Our next plenary meeting will take place here in the Council Chamber on Tuesday, 5 June at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.