

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and sixty-third plenary meeting


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 26 June 2018, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Mr. Walid Doudech..... (Tunisia)

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The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call to order the 1463rd meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, Ms. Kaspersen, ladies and gentlemen, allow me at the outset to thank Ambassador Aala, former President of the Conference, for the efforts he made during his presidency to draft a programme of work. Allow me also, on behalf of the Conference and the Tunisian delegation, to welcome our new colleagues, Ambassador Zniber, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco in Geneva, Ambassador Foradori, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the Conference on Disarmament, and Ambassador Lleshi, Permanent Representative of Albania, who is participating in our work as a representative of a non-member State. I would like to express our pleasure that the three new Ambassadors have been able to join us, and I wish them every success in their work.

Turning now to the business of the Conference, I must express regret that we have not yet been able to adopt a programme of work, despite the commendable efforts made by the previous presidencies this year. We will, however, continue to work with all delegations to achieve that goal, just as we will continue to work with the coordinators of the five subsidiary bodies in the hope of making progress. Please allow me now to make a statement on the occasion of the first meeting under the Tunisian presidency.

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased today to be assuming the rotating presidency of the Conference on Disarmament on behalf of the Republic of Tunisia. Tunisia takes its role very seriously and hopes to make an effective and constructive contribution during its presidency. In fact, my country is keen to ensure that multilateral efforts are as effective as possible, especially in relation to the maintenance of international peace and security, in particular through disarmament and the prohibition of all weapons of mass destruction. This stems from the Tunisian Government's firm belief in the importance of fulfilling the requirements of the Charter of the United Nations on the basis of a commitment to international legitimacy, the peaceful resolution of disputes and increased cooperation between States to address shared challenges. Tunisia has therefore supported the important efforts made thus far to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament and end the stalemate that has existed for nearly two decades, as, in line with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, the Conference is the only multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations. We must now redouble our efforts to create a new dynamic within this structure, in line with the mandate and decisions of the Conference, in order to ensure that it is able to resume its work on a promising footing.

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, Tunisia has assumed the presidency just as we are entering the final segment of the Conference's workload for this year. This timing gives us hope that we will be able to achieve tangible progress in our work. We have noted with satisfaction the important progress achieved in the Conference's work this year, in particular with the adoption of the decisions contained in documents CD/2119 and CD/2126, by which we were able to establish five subsidiary bodies relating to the substantive issues on the Conference's agenda. We will follow the progress of those bodies with great interest.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dynamic and decisive role played by the previous presidencies, led by the Ambassadors of Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland and the Syrian Arab Republic. I commend them for their efforts, which have conferred a new dynamism on our approach to the disarmament issues that we face. During my presidency, I intend to strengthen respect for the rule of continuity regarding the decisions of the Conference. I also intend to continue working with the subsidiary bodies and to discharge my mandate in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Conference, under which the President may examine the possibility of developing a programme of work. To that end, I hope to undertake the necessary consultations in a transparent manner to see what progress can be achieved and to assess the current situation regarding various issues related to the Conference's agenda, with a view to achieving consensus and opening up negotiations on those issues.

Distinguished colleagues, in the context of the efforts currently being made by the subsidiary bodies, and as I wish to deepen discussion on disarmament issues, I would like to refer to a recent initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres. His Agenda for Disarmament, launched a few weeks ago, is an important

opportunity, one that we must invest in and engage with. I therefore encourage the members of the Conference to comment on and contribute to the important recommendations and perspectives on disarmament set out in the Secretary-General's Agenda. The aim of the debate that I hope will be held on this topic is to expand the discussion and explore new and creative ways to promote the dynamism the Conference is currently experiencing through the work of its subsidiary bodies. I also intend to hold consultations with members of the Conference on Disarmament about the Secretary-General's initiative. I would like to hear your views and suggestions on how to engage with the Agenda, with a view to helping us work together to make progress in addressing issues of disarmament. Furthermore, in order to expand the scope of discussions on disarmament issues, the secretariat of the Conference intends to give representatives of civil society an opportunity to express their views on these issues. For my part, I believe that consultations with civil society are important and we ought to pay attention to them. The secretariat will organize the consultations and will inform you of the date and all other organizational details in advance. These consultations with civil society will be conducted outside the framework of the Conference on Disarmament.

Lastly, I wish to express my readiness to cooperate fully with all member States. I trust in your cooperation with the presidency and I look forward to receiving your positive contributions to help enrich and revitalize the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you for your attention.

I shall now switch to speaking in French, as it is one of the working languages of the United Nations.

(spoke in French)

As I announced yesterday to the coordinators of the regional groups, we are pleased to welcome Her Excellency Ms. Kneissl, Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria. I will therefore suspend the meeting for a few minutes in order to allow the Minister to join us.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President *(spoke in French)*: Distinguished colleagues, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Ms. Kneissl, Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, who has just joined us. Excellency, I welcome you to the Conference on Disarmament; we are delighted that you are joining us. You have the floor.

Ms. Kneissl (Austria): Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to address you here at the Conference on Disarmament. Although I have never worked in disarmament, I know Geneva quite well, having been here in the late 1980s and early 1990s several times. Even though Vienna is also home to the United Nations, and we try our utmost to promote it, honestly, this building is much better. It simply radiates an atmosphere that cannot be found in more recent buildings. So, it is very interesting for me to be back here and addressing this distinguished audience.

First of all, let me put it in a nutshell: I quit the foreign service about 20 years ago, and it is a big surprise to be back as a minister. I quit after having given serious thought to various aspects, one being that I knew I was simply too impatient to be a diplomat. I have deep respect for the patience, the perseverance you have, to go through these long sessions, to work on texts, and your work in the back corridors. I would like to repeat a quote that I have used over the past weeks again and again, from Jean-Yves Klein. I do not know whether anybody here in the room might remember him: he came from Alsace and he made his military career in the United States forces. I think some 15 or 20 years ago, at a conference in the Defence College in Vienna, he told me: "In successful preventive diplomacy, you never earn a medal for 'bravery in the field', because nobody knows that you have died." Successful preventive diplomacy, or successful diplomacy, is when you never find out that somebody was engaged in it, that somebody was active – the "unknown heroes" if I may call them that, who negotiated in the back corridors.

The way I understand diplomacy also includes the very crucial element of discretion. I am not and never have been a friend of public diplomacy. I think that, if you really want to achieve something, you should try to do it behind closed doors. We need, as the old

saying goes, “open covenants, secretly arrived at” – I think that description was coined after the First World War, when there was a big debate on secret diplomacy. We need open covenants secretly arrived at, not always openly arrived at, because sometimes you need closed communication that is not contested on an hourly basis by various forces, be they from the media or from somewhere else. It is all about working with discretion, working out of the limelight and achieving an outcome that really makes a change. So first of all, let me express my sincere respect for your patience, because I know that I am a fairly impatient person and I quit diplomacy *inter alia* because I knew I was not as patient as you are here. I will now start with my prepared text.

I would like to start by thanking Ambassador Doudech, and the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Michael Møller, and all of you, distinguished colleagues, for being here today.

Civilians fleeing bombed cities, chemical weapons being used again, threats with nuclear weapons: we see every day that disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are indispensable for global security. Global problems cannot be solved unilaterally. The rules-based global order is irreplaceable for a peaceful and prosperous globalized world. Effective multilateralism benefits collective security and thus all of us. Looking at the world, it is certainly urgently needed. Therefore, multilateral disarmament remains a long-standing priority of Austria's foreign policy.

We repeatedly talk of effective multilateralism and I would like to mention a very specific contract, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme. It is not only about arms control, or preventing a nuclear arms race, it is also about the tremendous importance of credibility, of the old embodiment of what the law is, namely *pacta sunt servanda*. That is what it is all about, that we remain trustworthy and credible in relation to the contracts that we conclude. I think that what is at stake right now with that particular treaty is not only the role of the various players: it is all about maintaining credibility and being trustworthy in relation to what you have signed.

Many of these pressing issues are dealt with by the Conference on Disarmament. I am honoured to address you here, thereby underlining Austria's firm commitment to this august body that was set up to negotiate disarmament treaties. And it is high time for this body to return to doing so, for the current situation is grim.

As the United Nations Secretary-General observes with concern in his important new Agenda for Disarmament, we are witnessing increasing militarization in many parts of the world. Just look at the more than twofold increase in global military spending since the end of the cold war. The more money is invested in weapons, the less remains for fundamental areas such as economic and social development. The resulting poverty and social unrest are not only an evil in themselves. They also undermine security. So States react by accumulating even more weapons, instilling further distrust and fostering conflict. In this way, the world is caught in a vicious circle.

Take nuclear weapons. They threaten our very existence. And yet modernization programmes are being undertaken, leading to a new arms race and triggering more tensions and a heightened risk for all of us. The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion, whether caused by accident, by design or by miscalculation, mean that these weapons cannot provide security.

Acknowledging the uniquely destructive, threatening and destabilizing effect of nuclear weapons, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), adopted 50 years ago, established a legal obligation for nuclear disarmament, the goal being a nuclear-weapon-free world. Austria is fully committed to this core objective of the NPT and to the Treaty as a whole, which is the cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Currently our objective is to contribute to making the 2020 NPT Review Conference a success.

As to non-proliferation, the Treaty has certainly served us all well in helping contain the uncontrolled spread of nuclear weapons. Without it, the world would be an even more dangerous place. Unfortunately, one State, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has withdrawn from this landmark agreement, developed nuclear weapons and tested them,

which has led to a dangerous escalation. Austria has condemned these tests, as well as those of missiles. Today, I welcome the summit meeting between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as an important step in the right direction. Building on the positive outcome of this historic meeting, further diplomatic efforts should bring denuclearization and a lasting peace to the Korean Peninsula.

The claim of some States that they need nuclear weapons for their own security will always induce others to want them too. This is how non-proliferation and disarmament, the two pillars of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, are linked. Barring a decisive breakthrough towards a nuclear-weapon-free world, proliferation crises, like the most recent one relating to the nuclear and ballistic missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, could unfortunately haunt us again.

At the same time, the world continues to face a number of serious situations involving States possessing nuclear weapons. The fact is that any of these situations could escalate into a nuclear catastrophe at any time. The only way to eliminate this unacceptable risk is to get rid of nuclear weapons altogether. Or, as former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon once remarked, "There are no right hands for the wrong weapons."

Mr. President, here in Geneva, this body elaborated the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996. Let me use this opportunity to urge those States represented here that have not yet ratified this very important Treaty to do so without further delay, so that it can finally enter into force.

I commend past progress in nuclear disarmament such as the completion of the reductions under the New START Treaty last February, and call on the Russian Federation and the United States to extend this Treaty and start negotiations on further cuts.

The around 14,500 nuclear weapons in existence today are still more than sufficient to wipe humanity off the face of the earth several times over. I remember very clearly when I was 15 or 16 years old, being first confronted with MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction. It shaped me a lot, what MAD stood for, reinforced by the word "mad" too, of course. And I remember also that, in the 1990s, we were all imagining that there would be a new chapter of international law beginning. I sometimes feel sorry for the students I have been teaching over the past 20 years, because they could not witness and live in the atmosphere that we had in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when we had the idea that there might be something new there. We had consistent reasons then to be confident but, since becoming a teacher, I have always felt awkward not to be conveying some sort of confidence to students in their early twenties.

So, I think these facts that we are facing – that you are facing in your negotiations – can only confirm the need for us to make a fresh start here, because the threat of nuclear war is with us and the unacceptable humanitarian impact it would bring seems even more acute today than it did at the time of the cold war, a time when I was growing up and, as I said, MAD shaped me a lot. And the situation is even worse in terms of the numbers today.

Nowadays, more actors possess nuclear weapons, and those actors interact with each other in an international environment which has become more complicated, less predictable and therefore more fraught with security risks. Needless to say, we all know the many notions about fragile States and failed States. Once upon a time, in the 1970s, we called it Balkanization; then we used Lebanization, and now we speak of Iraqization, Somalization, etc. It always breaks down to the same pattern, the disappearance of functioning State structures and thereby also the disappearance of symmetric actors. This is something that greatly impedes those who try hard to work not only on disarmament but also on humanitarian relief in general.

Against this dark background, there is hope, in the form of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This historic agreement, adopted last year, sends a powerful signal that the overwhelming majority of the world's States are not willing to accept the precarious nuclear status quo any longer. Finally, the most abhorrent weapon of mass destruction is prohibited, just like biological and chemical weapons. I am proud to say that Austria has been at the forefront of the broad international movement which produced this Treaty. The new Treaty is fully compatible with the existing international disarmament

and non-proliferation regime. Specifically, it strengthens the NPT and is indispensable for the full implementation of that Treaty's article VI. Austria deposited its instrument of ratification in May this year, and I call on all States represented here to join the growing community of signatories and to ratify it.

I am speaking here as the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention is taking place in The Hague. I am deeply concerned by the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as well as in some other places, which Austria fully and unreservedly condemns. Any such act constitutes a gross violation of the obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention – which, like the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, is another important achievement of the Conference on Disarmament. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) can already clarify which chemical substance was used. But, beyond that, those who have committed a violation have to be identified by an impartial multilateral attribution mechanism. Since the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism has not been prolonged by the Security Council, this function should be fulfilled by a new mechanism within the OPCW framework. And, finally, the perpetrators should be held accountable. Therefore, I commend and support the initiative taken by France to end impunity for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. What is at stake is whether we continue to uphold the international norm against chemical weapons, and, ultimately, the rules-based international order.

In recent years, significant progress has been achieved in reducing the horrendous impact of conventional weapons on civilians, notably through implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Let me use this opportunity to call on those States which have not yet done so to accede to these two important conventions. Anybody who has visited post-war countries, whether in Europe or elsewhere, knows how long these weapons haunt farmers, children going to school, etc. It is all about the remnants of the war.

Still far too many people all over the world fall victim to conventional weapons. As the United Nations Secretary-General points out in the section entitled "Disarmament that saves lives" of his new groundbreaking document "Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament", a particular concern is related to the urbanization of armed conflict, with its devastating and well-documented impacts on civilians. These are mainly a consequence of the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effect in populated areas. I am grateful that this pressing humanitarian issue continues to be high on the agenda of the United Nations, as it is on that of my country. The use of explosive weapons by armed forces, as well as by non-State actors, in conflicts all over the world currently leads to numerous and grave violations of international humanitarian law, resulting in tens of thousands of civilian deaths annually. In my previous career, I taught international humanitarian law, and I was shocked to learn that 92 per cent of victims were civilians. Going through the twentieth century, if we look at the changing proportion of military and civilian victims, we see that the First World War was still a war between armies; in the Second World War, it differed between the eastern and the western fronts. Today, it is all about urban war: it is all about civilians.

What we need therefore is a concerted effort by the international community to promote much stricter observance of international humanitarian law. This means not only sticking to the norms and not only disseminating information on the core issues, such as what a prisoner of war is or what the rights of prisoners of war are. I have seen, during my courses, the disappearance of taboos that you would imagine still existed among us. There is decreasing awareness of the basics of the so-called humanitarian common denominator that we once agreed upon – and I am not speaking only of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols. Consider the various documents concluded at the disarmament conferences preceding the First World War, including the famous Martens Clause, which was linked to the Saint Petersburg Declaration, agreed in the 1890s – it is striking that there was maybe a time when we were already a little bit more advanced in terms of a common denominator. Nevertheless, Austria will continue its efforts to address this issue, the aim being a political declaration.

Throughout history, warfare has always been closely linked to technological innovation. One of the current examples of this symbiotic relationship is the introduction of artificial intelligence in the military field. The key problem with this development which is now under way is that it makes it possible to design weapons capable of selecting and killing adversaries without a human actor necessarily being involved in the operation. Just before coming here to address this distinguished audience, I had a very interesting talk with some members of the International Committee of the Red Cross: such weapons are exactly what we might see at an affordable price in five to eight years' time. This prospect raises serious ethical, political and legal questions, and we need to act before such weapon systems are introduced. For compliance with international humanitarian law, it is essential to preserve meaningful human control over their critical functions, notably those of identifying, selecting and applying force to targets. In order not to be overtaken by undesirable developments in the near future, Austria is in favour of negotiating now a preventive prohibition of autonomous weapons systems which lack meaningful human control over critical functions.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we see from the manifold challenges in disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament has to overcome 20 years of self-imposed blockage and once again fulfil its mandate to bring about multilateral disarmament treaties. Certainly it is not the excellent and dedicated delegates and staff of the Conference on Disarmament that should be blamed. We have to make this august body fit for our century. We have to find ways to include the input of, and have a real dialogue with, civil society and academics, to enlarge membership so as to be truly representative and to halt an interpretation of consensus that hinders any sort of decision-making.

The Conference on Disarmament does not exist in isolation and reflects broader trends in international politics. For a number of years now, some States have come to perceive their relations with each other increasingly in terms of competition rather than cooperation. According to this mindset, unilateral solutions are preferred over multilateral ones. They strive to achieve security against, rather than together with, other States. They seek protection by directing weapons at each other, instead of investing in friendly relations. But we have moved on since the dark days of the cold war. Today's interconnected world necessitates global, rather than national, solutions. Not sterile competition, but only cooperation holds promise for success. And daily diplomacy is much more than confronting each other with policy briefing notes; it is really about entering into direct contact with each other and talking to each other, not talking about each other or, worse, about media outlets. I can only assure you that the Republic of Austria stands for effective multilateralism.

I thank you, Mr. President and distinguished colleagues, for your attention and let me say, again, how much I admire each and everyone in this chamber for the patience they display.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Excellency. We would like to thank the Minister for her important statement, especially for her concluding remarks, and we believe that her presence here today has really contributed to the quality of this meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. I believe that her contribution should be included in the deliberations of our Conference; it should give us fresh insight and new avenues to be explored. As President of this Conference, during the consultations to establish a programme of work for which I am responsible, I will take into account her recommendations and views, and the views of Austria, which continues to be a very influential member of the Conference and has a very clear vision of disarmament. Excellency, we thank you for your presence and wish you all the best in your future endeavours. I will now suspend the meeting in order to escort Minister Kneissl from the Council Chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President (*spoke in French*): Distinguished colleagues, we will now resume our work. I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Argentina.

Mr. Foradori (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. It is an honour for me to address this Conference for the first time as the Permanent Representative of the Argentine Republic. Allow me first of all to congratulate you on your assumption of

the presidency. You can be assured of the fullest cooperation of my country. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria for her words that surely served to highlight the importance of this body for disarmament.

Mr. President, in recent years the world has been undergoing radical changes in terms of international peace and security. Such changes are often unexpected and adjusting to them takes time, creating a sense of instability and insecurity. Contemporary international politics faces constant challenges. Nevertheless, international community is not unaffected by those changes, as we can see.

Certain universally recognized principles, such as the principle of non-interference between States, are starting to come under pressure. Argentina believes that the principle of non-indifference between States places certain limits on the principle of non-interference. Thus, violations of international security, crimes against humanity or war crimes trigger a backlash that is limited by the principles of non-armed intervention and non-aggression.

During the most recent meeting of foreign ministers of MERCOSUR and the Pacific Alliance, several States joined Argentina in vigorously condemning the inhuman 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. There were also calls to find, under the auspices of the United Nations, a political solution to the complex and chaotic situation in Syria. Argentina believes that the latest chemical weapons attack in Douma must be duly investigated. It trusts in the professionalism of the members of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) mission that was deployed, despite the risks inherent there. The report that emerges will surely help to identify those responsible so that they can be brought to justice.

The international community should reiterate its strongest condemnation of the use of chemical weapons. Accordingly, we applied the principle of non-indifference last year in urging the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on several occasions to abandon all existing nuclear weapons and programmes, including ballistic missile launches, in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. Fortunately, recent events have radically improved the situation. Argentina welcomed the recent presidential summit between President Trump and Kim Jong-un with great optimism. The two countries pledged to work together to build a lasting and stable peace in the peninsula, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reaffirmed its commitment to work towards the complete denuclearization of the peninsula. This could consolidate and pave the way for more ambitious and verifiable agreements. In particular, we believe that the signing and ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the prompt return of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors could send further positive signals to the region and the international community as a whole.

Mr. President, the work done last year by the working group on the way ahead, chaired by the Ambassador of Myanmar, showed that the discussion had been constructive and highlighted the need to continue the debate. We were thus able to create five subsidiary bodies this year to address the items on our agenda. We have also seen that the debate on some issues covered by the Conference on Disarmament will be strengthened by the more technical approach taken by other forums, including the Groups of Governmental Experts on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, on a fissile material cut-off treaty and on nuclear verification.

From this perspective, we believe that there is a political will for debate and renewed consensus. Whether the dialogue is more political, as in the Conference on Disarmament, or more technical, as in the groups of experts, it is central and vital to identifying common ground to build on. The opportunity to discuss the agenda items of the Conference on Disarmament from those two different perspectives provides a better foundation. Argentina believes that a mechanism needs to be established that will allow the debates held by the Conference on Disarmament and the Groups of Government Experts to complement and build on each other.

In order to reach any deal, it is essential that different perspectives be brought to the debate and that the best and most constructive approach be adopted in the security interests

of all States and of the international community as a whole. In our view, the adoption of a sustainable approach to dealing with future work is vital for the Conference on Disarmament and would be highly constructive. From this perspective, Argentina understands that the objective should focus on achieving a better context than last year, thus avoiding the paralysis that causes so much damage to the credibility of the Conference on Disarmament. In that regard, we hope that the outcome of the discussions in the subsidiary bodies will consolidate the foundations for building a solid consensus that will facilitate the swift adoption of a programme of work. Argentina hopes to play an active role in driving positive change towards mutually agreed goals. We do not believe it appropriate to be part of a kind of international conspiracy of silence while the concrete decisions being taken in many countries undermine our endeavours.

For these reasons, Mr. President, allow me to conclude that, while it is true that conflict is often inevitable, it is also true that peace remains an option. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Excellency, for your important statement and for the kind words addressed to the presidency. I shall now give the floor to His Excellency the Ambassador of Morocco.

Mr. Zniber (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, dear colleagues, I am addressing this august body for the first time since my accreditation in Geneva as Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco. I am pleased for two reasons. On the one hand, it is a return to the fold, since I had the honour and privilege to sit in this chamber 30 years ago, as a young diplomat. On the other hand, since I am speaking at a time when Tunisia, a fellow nation and friend, holds the presidency of our Conference, allow me, Mr. President, to extend to you my warm congratulations and our best wishes for a successful presidency. You can count on the full support of my delegation. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessors, whose perseverance and creativity enabled the Conference to adopt the decisions contained in documents CD/2119 and CD/2126 on the establishment of five subsidiary bodies. We welcome this adoption and the promising start to the work of these bodies.

Nevertheless, I cannot but wonder whether we will heed the call made last May by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Guterres, when he presented his Agenda for Disarmament; will we, in particular, take political action to resolve the deadlock in the Conference? Or will we, as in previous years, settle into a repetitive debate, punctuated sometimes by alarmism, at other times by frustration over lost opportunities? For its part, Morocco does not resign itself to such a fate. An understanding of its international responsibility as a member of the Conference drives Morocco to persevere, along with all members of the Conference, with its efforts to minimize disagreements on the issues addressed by the subsidiary bodies and, simultaneously, to work towards finalizing a thorough and balanced programme of work – and you can count on our support, Mr. President – with a negotiating mandate that will enable the Conference to resolve its long-standing deadlock. In this regard, we would like to recall that the Conference on Disarmament, by virtue of its regulations, is a negotiating body and this should therefore be duly reflected in its programme of work.

Mr. President, in a turbulent global context, in which international peace and security are at stake, the Conference is called upon to respond to the legitimate expectations of both the international community in general and its members in particular. More than ever, the Conference, the only multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament, is being challenged to fulfil its mandate. The persistence of numerous regional conflicts, the growing threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons, the militarization of outer space and non-compliance with international commitments made by nations under the fundamental disarmament instruments – as has been seen, unfortunately, with chemical weapons – constitute both threats to our world and challenges for our Conference. This is why, some 40 years after its establishment, the Conference is now at a decisive turning point in its existence. In such a context, a return to fundamentals is crucial; I could say it is of utmost importance. We must focus on the virtues of collective dialogue and multilateralism by reaffirming with conviction the central importance of the Conference as the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament.

At the same time, we should seek to adapt the Conference to the major challenges of our century so that it can respond appropriately to the inherent dangers of an international environment that is as unstable as it is tumultuous and that presents multiple threats, and to the challenges of this new century in which international peace and security are at stake. Points for discussion should not be exclusive or restrictive, but be based on shared concerns and direct or indirect threats to national and international security. I do not intend today, Mr. President, to share the substantive aspects of my country's positions on the issues on the agenda of this session, but rather, as I have done throughout this statement, to advocate for more open-mindedness and the exploration of an innovative approach in order to agree on ways and means to meet the new security challenges of our century, as stressed by the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria.

Mr. President, the Kingdom of Morocco remains true to its tradition of balance, moderation, open-mindedness and a constant commitment to working and contributing to all efforts likely to strengthen international peace and security. With this in mind, Morocco is calling on the member States to show greater political will and flexibility and appealing to their sense of responsibility as members of this Conference, in order not only to promote this global dialogue, but also to contribute substantially and directly to it, which we hope cannot fail to restore the Conference's position as a multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Excellency, for your important statement and the kind words addressed to the presidency. We welcome your presence here and your appointment to this important disarmament forum, and the fact that Morocco continues to be a very useful and engaged actor in the field of disarmament, particularly in this forum.

I would now like to welcome Mr. Møller to our midst. He has a very busy agenda, but he was keen to participate in this meeting, in a clear demonstration of his interest in disarmament issues. You are always welcome and we thank you for joining us, Director-General.

I now give the floor to the next speaker, His Excellency the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Azeez (Sri Lanka): First, let me congratulate you, Ambassador Doudech, on your assumption of the presidency at this most crucial time for the Conference on Disarmament. The delegation of Sri Lanka will continue to extend its support and cooperation with a view to achieving a balanced and comprehensive programme. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to convey its appreciation of the initiative and leadership demonstrated by the past Presidents of the Conference. I would like to thank Her Excellency, the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria for her inspiring words about the creative potential and ability of multilateral diplomacy to address the challenges to peace and security. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Michael Møller, for his presence here today.

In the months of May and June, we heard a number of statements on some substantive and procedural matters in the Conference on Disarmament. Unfortunately, there has been no sustained focus on the disarmament agenda launched by the United Nations Secretary-General on 24 May 2018 in Geneva. It is important that deliberations take place on it in the relevant forums, and in this body, in particular. In this context, we very much appreciate the initiative taken by you, Mr. President, to discuss the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda in the Conference on Disarmament during your presidency. We fervently look forward to that discussion.

Progress on disarmament has been held up for over 20 years since the Conference on Disarmament last adopted a treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, in 1996. All efforts and initiatives aimed at adopting a programme of work have since failed. Procedural wrangling and substantive disorientation have consistently marked the functioning of this body, thus creating a perception of a new normal of inaction. The inequities inherent in the nuclear disarmament discourse have only accentuated the differences among the membership over long years. It is against this backdrop that we consider the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda timely and appropriate.

In launching his disarmament agenda on 24 May, the Secretary-General graphically captured the dilemma that humanity as a whole faces today. He decried the multiple challenges to the survival of humanity, emphatically stating, “We are living in dangerous times” and “The world is going backwards”. We could not agree with him more. The Secretary-General’s description of a “world going backwards” meant a lot more than just the reversal of norms, its centrality being the failure of disarmament – and not nuclear disarmament alone. His sweep was broader, but it struck to the crux of the problem – insecurity, arising from a lack of progress in disarmament in a broader sense, including lapses in implementation of obligations under the relevant treaties. What constitutes the central thrust of his disarmament agenda is the goal of the eventual elimination of all types of weapons, including weapons of mass destruction. As I stated earlier, and as you have rightly intimated, Mr. President, the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda should be reflected on seriously. The issues he has raised and the observations he has made are not entirely new, but the manner they have been woven together to highlight the danger that we collectively face is no less instructive. Not everyone may agree with everything, but together, they cannot be rejected since they represent the varied strands that make up the whole fabric of the case. The concerns raised impact not just on national security and global security, but on human security in particular. The Secretary-General calls them, in our view very aptly, “indivisible”. The dimension of human security in the disarmament and non-proliferation context is a refreshing addition to the notion of human security, as thus far known in other areas of the United Nations’ agenda.

Mr. President, what is the take-home message from the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda? How is it going to translate into reality in the current global context? We look forward to the discussion that you will convene under your presidency to explore these questions comprehensively, but we should not allow the essence of his message to fade away in the meantime.

The use of nuclear weapons is, as many have said in the recent past, only “a human error away”, even leaving aside other possibilities of their compulsive or impulsive use. The blurring of lines between familiar arguments advanced by States and the varied understanding of the nature and scope of confidence-building measures from one end of the spectrum to the other – what one might call negative security assurances – has impeded the effective pursuit of general and complete disarmament until now. Work on general and complete disarmament cannot be left pending any longer while the reversal of norms is becoming real. Disarmament to save humanity, disarmament to save lives, disarmament for future generation is the clarion call that needs to be heeded if the world is to survive as one. Meaningful and practical implementation of the sustainable development goals calls, first and foremost, for such a vision.

It is obvious that work has to proceed at multiple levels. The Conference on Disarmament has a mandated role to negotiate and produce an outcome that should, we believe, have at its heart a determination to ensure human security in the manner articulated in the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda. Dialogue needs to commence within regions and across regions to evolve arms control mechanisms or zones of peace free from weapons of mass destruction, thus contributing to durable international peace and security. Negative security assurances require unambiguous and unqualified expression as an integral aspect of the goal of the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, translating all aspects of the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda into action will require the active summoning of the political will, accompanied by a clear commitment to move forward. Within the Conference on Disarmament, we should make concerted, expeditious efforts to evolve a programme of work through consensus.

The first test of reality has been provided by the decision contained in document CD/2119, adopted in February 2018. This, along with the decision contained in document CD/2126, has led to the establishment of five subsidiary bodies to discuss and build consensus on the varied aspects of disarmament discourse, as mandated by the decision contained in document CD/2119. We compliment the coordinators for the initiative and the focused discussions that have taken place so far within the subsidiary bodies and encourage all delegations to move forward with a view to achieving consensus. If successful early enough, they could possibly lead us to arriving at the programme of work that has eluded us

for over two decades. The essential responsibility of this body to negotiate a programme of work, however, remains.

As we delve into the substantive content of the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda, we would do well to consider avoiding familiar arguments that have kept us apart for too long. We should aim to bring all elements in the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda that are relevant to the mandate of this body to bear upon the deliberations within it. Familiar arguments often dominate discussions when one side does not want to move away from the hard position it has taken, while expecting the other side to make compromises.

Progress in disarmament is both urgent and important. Today is no time to haggle over procedural aspects, especially when we have abandoned substance for far too long. The need for innovative and creative approaches is now pronounced. The Secretary-General's disarmament agenda appears to reflect such an approach for the future.

While we attune ourselves to the urgency of the Secretary-General's call, we also need to address a matter of serious interest to the developing countries. The inaction or lack of progress in disarmament has, over two decades, led to the loss of a generation of professionals and experts in disarmament in many countries. Increased availability of disarmament education and fellowship opportunities – a matter that the Secretary-General has not spoken of as part of his disarmament agenda – is imperative and should receive the attention it deserves.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you very much, Excellency, for your very constructive contribution, and I hope that we will have the opportunity to hold bilateral discussions as part of the consultations that I will lead on the programme of work, which the presidency is tasked with establishing for each session. I now give the floor to His Excellency the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, Mr. Duong, on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. Duong (Viet Nam) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, first of all, I would like to express our sincere congratulations on your election as President of this Conference and also assure you of our full support for your efforts and work as President. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your speech, and to thank the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria for having shared with us the importance of diplomacy, the importance of disarmament work, and also the importance of the work of our Conference.

(*spoke in English*)

Mr. President, I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of the member States of the Group of 21 on nuclear disarmament.

The Group of 21 reiterates that the Conference on Disarmament is the single multilateral negotiating body on disarmament and, in that context, the Group stresses that its highest priority on the Conference on Disarmament agenda is nuclear disarmament. The Group reiterates its deep concern at the danger posed to the survival of humankind by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and of their possible use or threat of use. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their use and proliferation will remain.

The Group reiterates its position as conveyed in its previous statements to the Conference on Disarmament and recalls the Final Documents of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly – the First Special Session on Disarmament – and the very first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, resolution 1 (I) of 1946, adopted unanimously, which called for the elimination of nuclear weapons from national arsenals.

The Non-Aligned Movement countries that are members of the Group recall the 2012 Tehran Declaration and Final Document adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement, the Declaration and Final Document of the 17th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held on Margarita Island, Venezuela, in September 2016, as well as the Final Document of the eighteenth Midterm Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in April 2018.

Furthermore, the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion of 1996, concluded that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion

negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. In this regard, the Group recalls its strong support for United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/58, on follow-up to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 also reaffirmed the commitment of Member States of the United Nations to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons.

The Group welcomes the formal proclamation, for the first time in history, of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace, on the occasion of the Second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Havana, Cuba, on 28 and 29 January 2014, which includes the commitment of all States of that region to further nuclear disarmament as a priority goal and to contribute to general and complete disarmament. Hopefully, this proclamation will be followed by other political proclamations of zones of peace in other regions of the world. The Group welcomes the Political Declaration of Quito, adopted at the Fourth Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Quito, Ecuador, on 27 January 2016, which reaffirms, *inter alia*, the Community's commitment to the preservation of peace and international security, political independence and nuclear disarmament conducive to general, total and verifiable disarmament. The Group also welcomes the Political Declaration of Punta Cana adopted at the Fifth Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on 25 January 2017, which reaffirms, *inter alia*, the Community's commitment to achieve the total prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. It reaffirms its commitment to the consolidation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace and highlights its character as the first-ever nuclear-weapon-free zone, established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco. The Group of 21 welcomes the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco on 14 February 2017 in Mexico in the framework of the Twenty-fifth Session of the General Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Group also welcomes the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, known as the Treaty of Pelindaba, signed in Cairo, Egypt, in 1996. The Treaty, which came into effect on 15 July 2009, seeks to prevent the stationing of nuclear explosive devices and prohibit the testing of nuclear weapons and the dumping of radioactive waste on the continent. The African Commission on Nuclear Energy was established for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the obligations under the Treaty.

While noting the steps taken by nuclear-weapon States towards the reduction of their arsenals, the Group reiterates its deep concern over the slow pace of progress towards nuclear disarmament and the lack of progress achieved by the nuclear-weapon States towards the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The Group stresses the importance of effective implementation of concrete measures leading to a nuclear-weapon-free world. This requires renewed political will from the international community to bring about accelerated progress on nuclear disarmament. The Group hopes that all States will seize all opportunities towards this end.

The Group welcomes the convening and results of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament held on 26 September 2013 and reaffirms the related General Assembly resolutions 70/34 and 72/251 on follow-up to that meeting. As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations rightly mentioned in the Conference on Disarmament in 2015: "The high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament demonstrated that this issue remains a major international priority and deserves attention at the highest level." In this vein, the Group fully supports the goals of resolution 70/34, in particular its call for an urgent decision by the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiating nuclear disarmament, particularly 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. The Group also welcomes the decision to convene in New York, no later than 2018, a United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament to review the progress made in this regard. The Group welcomes with appreciation the

establishment of 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly organized every year to commemorate and promote this international day, highlighting the events around the world in commemoration of this day, and calls on Governments, parliaments and civil society to take further action annually to commemorate the day. In this context, the Group recalls its working papers contained in documents CD/2063 and CD/2067.

The Group reaffirms the importance of multilateral disarmament machinery. It notes the reports of the open-ended working group mandated by the General Assembly to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons, and hopes that it will contribute towards negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament, particularly 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.

The Group takes note of the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 7 July 2017 at the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, held in New York from 27 to 31 March and from 15 June to 7 July 2017 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/258.

The Group expresses its deepest concern over the immediate, indiscriminate and massive death and destruction that would be caused by any nuclear weapon's detonation and the long-term catastrophic consequences it would have on human health, the environment and other vital economic resources, thus endangering the life of present and future generations. In this regard, the Group believes that the full realization of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches, efforts and international commitments towards nuclear disarmament, through an inclusive process involving all States.

The Group concurs with the former United Nations Secretary-General that there is a growing understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, and in this regard welcomes the hosting of the conferences on this subject convened in Oslo on 4 and 5 March 2013, in Mexico on 13 and 14 February 2014 and in Vienna on 8 and 9 December 2014.

The States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons welcome the spirit of the findings of the conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, together with the pledges and national statements made by many States during and since the Vienna conference aimed at securing progress on nuclear disarmament through the negotiation of legally binding effective measures, particularly on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons, with a specified time frame. The States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty call on all nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty to implement their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament, to which all States parties are committed under article VI of the Treaty. Given the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and unacceptable risks and threats associated with the detonation of nuclear weapons, the States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty will endeavour to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders in efforts to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. In this regard, the Group notes with satisfaction the relevant resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its seventy-second session.

The Group, stressing its strong commitment to nuclear disarmament, underscores the urgent need to commence negotiations on this issue in the Conference on Disarmament without delay. In this context, the Group reaffirms its full readiness to start negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, including a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to the global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons within the specified time frame.

In this regard, the Group emphasizes that the fundamental principles of transparency, verification and irreversibility shall be applied to all nuclear disarmament measures.

The Group reaffirms that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are substantively interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The Group emphasizes that progress in nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, in all its aspects, is essential to strengthening international peace and security. The Group reaffirms that efforts towards nuclear disarmament, global and regional approaches and confidence-building measures complement each other and should, whenever possible, be pursued simultaneously to promote regional and international peace and security.

The Group reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Pending the achievement of the complete elimination of such weapons, the Group reaffirms the urgent need for the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument to effectively assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as a matter of high priority. The Group expresses concern that, despite the commitment of the nuclear-weapon States and the long-standing request by non-nuclear-weapon States to receive such legally binding assurances, no tangible progress has been achieved in this regard. It is a matter of more concern that non-nuclear-weapon States have been subject, implicitly and explicitly, to nuclear threats by some nuclear-weapon States, contrary to the obligations of the latter under the United Nations Charter. The Group also calls for the commencement of negotiations in order to reach agreement on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/59.

The Group expresses its concern about the strategic defence doctrines of nuclear-weapon States and a group of States which set out rationales for the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In this regard, there is therefore a genuine and urgent need to eliminate the role of nuclear weapons in strategic doctrines and security policies in order to minimize the risk that these weapons will ever be used and to facilitate the process of their elimination. In this regard, the Group recalls its strong support for the objectives of General Assembly resolution 72/41 of 4 December 2017, on reducing nuclear danger and of General Assembly resolution 71/53, on decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

The Group stresses the significance of achieving universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, including by all nuclear-weapon States, which should, *inter alia*, contribute to the process of nuclear disarmament. The Group reiterates that, if the objectives of the Treaty are to be fully realized, the continued commitment of all signatories, especially the nuclear-weapon States, to nuclear disarmament will be essential.

The Group reaffirms the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, and expresses its determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in these areas. In this regard, the Group strongly supports the objectives of General Assembly resolution 72/48 of 4 December 2017, on promotion of multilateralism in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation.

The States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) express their disappointment and deep concern that three States parties, including two States that bear special responsibilities as NPT depositary and co-sponsor States of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference resolution on the Middle East, blocked consensus on the draft outcome documents of the 2015 NPT Review Conference, including the process to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, as contained in the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. This could undermine efforts to strengthen the NPT regime as a whole. The States parties of the Group of 21 to the NPT reaffirm that the 1995 resolution on the Middle East continues to constitute the basis for the establishment of such a zone and that the 1995 resolution remains valid until fully implemented. They also express their serious concern over the lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution and, in accordance with paragraph 6 of this resolution, “Call upon all States party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to extend their cooperation and to exert their utmost efforts with a view to ensuring the early establishment by regional parties of a Middle East zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction”, and reaffirm that the co-sponsors of the resolution must take all the necessary measures to

fully implement it without further delay. The States parties of the Group of 21 to the NPT express their utmost concern that the persistent lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution, contrary to the decision made at the relevant NPT Review Conferences, erodes the credibility of the NPT and disrupts the delicate balance among its three pillars, taking into account that the indefinite extension of the Treaty is inextricably linked to the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. In this context, the States parties of the Group of 21 to the NPT reaffirm the urgency of Israel acceding to the Treaty without further delay and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. While the lack of agreement on an outcome document could undermine the NPT regime, the States parties of the Group of 21 to the NPT emphasize the continued validity of all relevant commitments made in 1995, 2000 and 2010, in particular the unequivocal undertaking to move towards nuclear disarmament, and call for their full implementation without further delay.

The Group also wishes to reaffirm the inalienable right of each State to develop, research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.

The Group reiterates its readiness to make constructive contributions to the work of the Conference, and in this regard wishes to recall the contents of documents CD/36/Rev.1, CD/116, CD/341, CD/819, CD/1388, CD/1462, CD/1570, CD/1571, CD/1923, CD/1938, CD/1959, CD/1999, CD/2044, CD/2063 and CD/2099, submitted by the Group of 21 towards this end.

The Group takes note of the substantive and interactive informal discussions on nuclear disarmament held in the Conference on Disarmament from 21 to 23 May 2014 pursuant to the schedule of activities for the 2014 session, as contained in document CD/1978, on 11 and 18 June 2015 pursuant to the schedule of activities for the 2015 session, as contained in document CD/2021, and from 8 to 10 August 2017 under the working group on the way ahead, established by the decision contained in CD/2090.

In view of the Group's strong commitment to nuclear disarmament and to a world free of nuclear weapons, the Group of 21 reiterates the following concrete steps:

- (a) Reaffirmation of the unequivocal commitment of the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the complete elimination of nuclear weapons;
- (b) Elimination of the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines;
- (c) Adoption of measures by nuclear-weapon States to reduce nuclear danger, such as de-alerting nuclear weapons and decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems;
- (d) Negotiation of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;
- (e) Negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament of a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use or threat of use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to a global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame.

To conclude, the Group of 21 highlights with satisfaction the events that took place around the world to mark the commemoration of 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, devoted to furthering this objective, including through enhancing public awareness and education about the threat posed to humanity by nuclear weapons and the necessity of their total elimination, in order to mobilize international efforts towards achieving this goal, and in this context calls upon Member States to participate every year at the highest possible level in the one-day high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate and promote this international day, and also invites Member States, the United Nations system, civil society, academia, parliamentarians, and the mass media and individuals to take additional measures every year to commemorate this day.

The President: Thank you very much, Ambassador, for your important contribution. I would now like to give the floor to Ambassador Wood, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President, and I promise I will not go on for quite as long. Since this is the first time I have taken the floor under your presidency, let me congratulate you on assuming your new position and offer my Government's support as you undertake your duties.

Mr. President, the time frame of 28 May through 22 June was a sad period in the history of the Conference on Disarmament. The Syrian presidency of the Conference on Disarmament was a travesty for multilateralism at large, but specifically for the arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. When you have a regime that has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people assuming the presidency of the body that negotiated the Chemical Weapons Convention, a convention that outlaws the use of such weapons, we have to ask ourselves about the signal sent to the countless Syrian victims of the regime's crimes.

In the view of the United States, the Syrian presidency was illegitimate and that country's delegation lacked the moral authority to preside over this body. Many other delegations refused to meet with the regime's delegates, many countries lowered their diplomatic representation in meetings and consultations, and other delegations questioned the fitness of the regime to serve as Conference on Disarmament president. Let me say to the regime's enablers, you are on the wrong side of history, and the Syrian people will eventually hold you and the regime to account.

In short, the regime's effort to try to portray its presidency as a normal presidency was a huge failure. This was no normal presidency. In fact, it was so out of the ordinary that there were campaigns on social media for Conference on Disarmament members to boycott the Conference for the four weeks Syria presided over the body. Following the first Conference on Disarmament plenary, after we witnessed that presidency's repeated attempts to politicize its role, the United States decided to stay away from all Conference on Disarmament activities for the duration of the regime's presidency.

Mr. President, be assured that the United States delegation will continue to call out Syria and its enablers for the regime's continued use of chemical weapons and its violations of its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty safeguards agreement. And, while Syria and its enablers will certainly claim that the United States and other like-minded States are "poisoning the atmosphere" at the Conference on Disarmament, as the Syrian representative did during the plenary on 29 May, we will continue to condemn the poisoning of innocent men, women and children in Syria by the regime and its forces.

Just to follow up on some of the comments that were made by the distinguished Austrian foreign minister, she mentioned that nuclear weapons do not provide security. That is not our view. They do provide security for a number of countries. As I have said many times, as have others in this body, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will not contribute to practical real disarmament and will not reduce global nuclear weapon stockpiles by one single weapon. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has only exacerbated the divisions in the disarmament community and, in our view, undermines the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Finally, Mr. President, on a more positive note, I would like to give a very brief read-out of the 12 June 2018 United States-Democratic People's Republic of Korea summit in Singapore. The summit resulted in the signing of a joint statement wherein Chairman Kim reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and President Trump committed to providing security guarantees to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. President Trump achieved his objectives: he secured a commitment from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to denuclearize and build a good working relationship with Chairman Kim. This is the beginning of the process to achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea. Should the Democratic People's Republic of Korea follow through on its commitments, we look forward to eventually establishing new United States-Democratic People's Republic of Korea relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity. President Trump recognizes that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has great potential. He also recognizes its desire for security and is prepared to ensure that a denuclearized Democratic People's Republic of Korea is also a secure

Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In a show of good faith, the United States will suspend large-scale military exercises with South Korea as long as productive negotiations continue. There is absolutely no change to our commitment to the defence of South Korea.

As President Trump said, he looks forward to a day when sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea can be removed. The United States looks forward to follow-on negotiations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea led by United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the earliest possible date to implement the outcomes of the United States-Democratic People's Republic of Korea summit.

The President: Thank you Excellency. Now, I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me congratulate you on the assumption of your role and assure you of my delegation's full support for your efforts.

I have two different things to say, one that I must say and one that I would like to say. So, duty first. While we very much welcome the visit to the Conference of the foreign minister of Austria, we do take exception to her calling on States to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. As a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) State, the United Kingdom joined the statement by NATO Allies on 20 September from which I would just briefly like to read: "As Allies committed to advancing security through deterrence, defence, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, we, the Allied nations, cannot support this treaty. Therefore, there will be no change in the legal obligations on our countries with respect to nuclear weapons. Thus we would not accept any argument that this treaty reflects or in any way contributes to the development of customary international law. We call on all our partners and on all countries who are considering supporting this treaty to seriously reflect on its implications for international peace and security, including on the NPT."

Now, the less dutiful part. Colleagues, after five years, my time in Geneva is coming to a close and I must bid you farewell. As I have thought about what I must do next, not the position I will hold, but actually what I will do in that role, I have come to recognize even more clearly what a privilege it has been to serve here. It has had its frustrations but it has been a privilege all the same. Without wanting to sound like a winner at the Oscars I do want to say a few thank yous. I would like to say thank you to the behind-the-scenes team, the secretariat, the conference services staff and the interpreters, who for once did get at least part of my statement in advance today. I would like to thank you, colleagues. Whether we have found common cause or not, I have respected the professionalism with which you have engaged. I have learned a great deal about the practice of our profession in the process. And last but far from least, thank you to my delegation. I am proud of what we have achieved together.

Now, some use their final meetings to say things that they have felt unable to say over the years. I have not saved any such thing to say. Within the bounds of diplomacy, I have said what I thought when I thought it and on the whole I have not regretted it. Some use their final meeting to offer pearls of wisdom, I will spare you a lecture. But I would like to share a piece of someone else's wisdom with you. It is a poem written by Rudyard Kipling. It is entitled "If". And it goes like this:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster

And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Now the poem was written over 120 years ago. It is a product of its time and I would encourage the ladies amongst you not to take umbrage. I read it not because of its emphasis on masculinity, but because I find it a very good recipe for the multilateral diplomat. So colleagues, in concluding, let me encourage you not to let yourselves be dragged down by the poor behaviour of others or the quest for the lowest common denominator, but instead to seek to rise above it; not to bemoan the results of negotiations past, but instead to look to construct tomorrow's outcomes; to remember that our successors should benefit from our efforts just as we have benefited from the efforts of our predecessors. And finally, and above all, to make the most of the time available to you. I can tell you that it goes by all too quickly.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Excellency, for your statement, and I believe that the applause we have just heard really reflects the esteem in which you are held by the members present in this chamber and the delegations, and I think that now, as you leave the Conference on Disarmament, you will hear nothing but praise from the various delegations. Although I have not had the opportunity to work with you personally, I know that you have done an excellent job and that you have represented your country well, and for all this I congratulate you. From colleague to colleague, I believe that, as diplomats, we are all bound to represent our countries and act within the framework of a dialogue that must consider the interests of all and with the assurance that we are doing the right thing to advance multilateralism; otherwise, if we did not work together respectfully and in a context of mutual understanding of each other's situation, it would not make any sense to meet here as member States. And I must say that, for the short time I have had to see you work and represent the stance of your country, you have done a good job and for that I congratulate you. On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament, if all the delegations will permit me, I would like to wish you all the best in your future work and activities. Thank you, Excellency, and good luck. Now, I see that another distinguished Ambassador wishes to take the floor. I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Germany.

Mr. Biontino (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me at the outset congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation. Germany remains, as always, committed to effective, value-based multilateralism. As such, the Conference on Disarmament is a pivotal element in the existing arms control and disarmament architecture. We have to strive to make it, once again, the effective negotiating forum for multilateral arms control and disarmament.

Previous speakers have already referred to the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Let me lay out my country's position. We hope that the Singapore summit marked the beginning of a process that will lead to complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. This is the kind of diplomatic approach that we would like to see at the settling of disarmament issues worldwide. We strongly hope that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will honour this possibility by implementing concrete and verifiable steps towards denuclearization.

Since I am leaving the German foreign service, Mr. President, I beg your indulgence for a couple of farewell remarks. As has been outlined already by my good friend, the distinguished Ambassador of the United Kingdom, these farewell speeches can turn into a recital of things the person claimed to have achieved during his tenure or a reminder to the audience of what they should do after his departure. I will spare you both and try to be brief.

However, I too would like to begin with a quote from a well-known poet. In this case, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*. It says: "Whoever strives to strive, we can redeem." For the last five years, I was able to witness how we all strove to make the Conference on Disarmament work again. We partially managed. We had a schedule of activities in 2014 and 2015, in 2017 this was followed by the working group on the way ahead and this year we managed to establish subsidiary bodies with a mandate to consider effective measures, including legal instruments for negotiations. All it takes for substantive progress is political will by all of us.

Let me continue on a personal level. In these times of crisis, it is sometimes good to remember why we engage in multilateral arms control and disarmament. Foremost, I would maintain that there is a widespread conviction concerning the humanitarian dimension of arms control and disarmament, be it related to nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction or, on the conventional side, anti-personnel mines, cluster munition, certain other conventional weapons, lethal autonomous weapon systems or explosive weapons in populated areas. To strive only for a legitimate arms trade, and dealing with and as far as possible reducing the humanitarian consequences of the use of weapons, is for many the main driver behind their engagement in arms control and disarmament. This, for many, goes hand in hand with the security policy dimension of arms control and disarmament. One of the basic tenets of a cooperative approach to security is "higher levels of security with lower levels of armament". At the end of the cold war in Europe, this paradigm had remained unchallenged for a long time and it had proven to be successful. Nowadays, however, we have to strive to revitalize it. Only too often relative advantage is sought in unilateral gains or the quest for superiority. In the end, what counts – and I hope it will be convincing – is the security of our people. A third and often overlooked driver is the economic and developmental dimension of arms control and disarmament. Peace is a prerequisite for sustainable global development and, at the same time, sets free substantial resources for such development. However, and very unfortunately, there seems to be a widespread consensus that the present very difficult security environment does not lend itself to new innovative approaches and substantial progress in terms of new agreements. The term "arms control and disarmament architecture" is often used in this context. Indeed, there are times when architects are called for to envisage grand new designs. There seems to be little hope that such undertakings could succeed right now and produce substantive results. Maybe smaller steps have a better chance. To stay with the analogy of architecture, we live in times when civil engineers are needed to consolidate structures, reinforce weak elements and improve implementation. Given the challenges resulting from the present security environment, this is no small feat. United Nations Secretary-General Guterres set out the tasks that we as the engineers would have to undertake. Disarmament to save humanity, to save lives and for future generations – a challenge in itself. To go back to Goethe's quote, in order to be redeemed, we will have to continue to strive, and to strive earnestly.

Last but not least, the weather outside is splendid: that is why my good friend Ambassador Rowland and I myself have today organized a farewell reception. You all are heartily welcome. Please come at 6.30 p.m. to the Geneva Press Club La Pastorale.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Excellency. Once again, the applause we have just heard bears testament to your much appreciated role here in the Conference on

Disarmament. Like Ambassador Rowland, who spoke before you, you too have cited a poem. If I had known beforehand that you were both going to finish your terms and leave this Conference, I would have prepared a poem myself, but in Arabic, because, as you know, we are particularly good at poetry. I remember, when I first arrived here three and a half years ago, one of my first tasks was to organize a side event with you and your team on the issue of biological weapons, in the context of the cooperation between Germany and Tunisia. I have greatly appreciated the very active role you have played and your engagement in the field of disarmament; we also appreciate the leadership role that Germany is playing in this field, as well as your own commitment and dynamism, not least as chair of subsidiary body no. 4 on negative security assurances, a position that bears testament to this Conference's appreciation of and trust in you. I wish both you and the Ambassador of the United Kingdom every success in your future activities and endeavours and I thank you both on behalf of the members of the Conference.

I noted earlier that His Excellency the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic wished to exercise his right of reply. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, as this is the first time that I have taken the floor during the Tunisian presidency of the Conference, allow me to congratulate you and to assure you of our full support as you carry out your duties. Since joining the Conference in 1996, the Syrian Arab Republic has always devoted considerable attention to the role and mandate of the Conference as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. We are proud that, during the Syrian presidency in 1998, we helped achieve consensus on one of the last programmes of work on which the Conference was able to agree, which, with the adoption of the decision contained in document CD/1501, relaunched the Conference's substantive work.

We regret that we were not able to replicate this success this time owing to the political disruption that the United States has caused over the past few weeks in order to hinder the work of the Conference. In violation of the rules of procedure, the United States attempted to force the Conference to go without a President. They failed, however, and instead continued to spread their deluded ideas outside the Council Chamber, while inside the Conference continued its work in a responsible and professional manner. Even today, the United States has not ceased in its attempts to disrupt the work of the Conference and its subsidiary bodies. We must take a stand against such behaviour.

In order to demonstrate the full magnitude of the manipulation and double standards of the United States, I shall quote a single sentence from the statement delivered by the United States Ambassador in this chamber on 22 August 2017: "Attempts to try to undermine the Conference or to try to shut down its work in pursuit of some other agenda should not be accepted by this chamber." Mr. President, my country deplores these attempts at politicization led by the United States, as well as its insistence on raising issues that fall outside the agenda adopted at the start of the year. We also deplore the exaggerated claims made by certain States that go beyond the norms and rules on which the Conference and its rules of procedure were founded. In particular, we reject all attempts by the United States to assume the role of judge, granting itself the right to issue certificates of good behaviour to others, or the role of policeman, insisting on taking unilateral action outside the law to enforce its own morally selective rules.

Every person in this chamber is aware that the United States, which feels entitled to lecture others on States' compliance with their treaty obligations, shirked its own obligations concerning the elimination of nuclear weapons, including its obligations under article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), when it introduced nuclear doctrines into its most recent national security strategy and when its President boasted of the size of its nuclear launch buttons and threatened to use its nuclear weapons. We all know that the United States, by insisting on evading its legal obligation to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, prevented the 2015 NPT Review Conference from adopting its final document. We all know that the United States continues, under false pretexts, to avoid fulfilling its obligation to dispose of its chemical weapons arsenal, the largest such arsenal in the world, even after the deadline, yet it continues to lecture others on compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The United States has made allegations about the use of chemical weapons in Syria and who should be held accountable. Yet, given its own extensive experience of using chemical weapons during the wars that it waged in the 1960s and 1970s, the United States understands better than any other the military circumstances that might lead to the use of chemical weapons where possessed by a State that is willing to use them without hesitation, such as the United States. It is also well aware of just how many casualties such weapons can cause. Based on this historical experience, the United States knows that its accusations against the Syrian Government are fabricated and do not stand up to reason. In fact, Syria does not possess any chemical weapons, nor does it have the military infrastructure or capabilities to use them. Moreover, there have not been any incidents that have produced as many victims as would be expected following the use of this type of weapon of mass destruction.

I call upon the United States to cease its foolish campaigns, to cease playing the same tiresome record that has served only to expose its own motives and objectives. I call on the United States to focus instead on the agenda, mandate and role of the Conference. Only then will many in this chamber be able to welcome the fact that the Conference has resumed its work, once it has ceased to be held hostage to the interests and political agenda of the United States. The statement by the United States representative in response to that by the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs on the topic of nuclear weapons clearly shows which party is standing on the wrong side of history. And while I am referring to the statement by the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, I would like to touch upon what she said about the special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The United States and its allies recently conducted an extensive campaign to convene a special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The true purpose of this special session is to move to a new level of provocation and to exploit pretexts concerning the alleged use of chemical weapons by authorizing the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to create a new mechanism to identify those responsible for using chemical weapons. However, this has nothing to do with the Director-General's mandate or role. The Chemical Weapons Convention, which was negotiated in this forum, does not contain a single provision that provides for the creation of such a mechanism. The Convention clearly states that, in cases of particular gravity and urgency, the relevant information and conclusions must be brought directly to the attention of the Security Council. So what we are currently witnessing is a brazen attempt to manipulate the Convention and twist the interpretation of its provisions, in order to allow the States in question to create a new mechanism over which they will have control and which will draw conclusions to match their political wishes and interests. We are witnessing an attempt to use a purely technical organization – OPCW – to sidestep the mandate of the Security Council, thereby also disrupting the work of one of the most successful disarmament and non-proliferation mechanisms. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): Dear colleagues, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that we must finish at 1 p.m. So, please take this time constraint into account when delivering your statements. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lee Jang-keun (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, let me join others in congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency. I believe that your able leadership will serve to move the work of this body forward by mitigating the era of polarization in this room. I assure you of my delegation's full support in your endeavours to this end. I would then like to extend a sincere welcome to our new colleagues, the Ambassadors of Argentina and Morocco. I look forward to working closely with them. And I also extend my sorrowful farewell to our departing colleagues, Ambassador Rowland and Ambassador Biontino. I wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Mr. President, during your presidency, all five subsidiary bodies will close their substantive discussions, save for only one session working on their respective reports. Looking back over the past six weeks, the exchange of general views and experts' presentations in the subsidiary bodies were all of great use in deepening our understanding

of major issues. At the same time, we have still witnessed along the way an ever-widening gap in our views and competing priorities across the member countries. But we should be mindful that dialogue among delegations is the foremost powerful tool with which to build mutual trust and confidence, the prerequisites for creating the right conditions for future negotiations.

Regarding the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which was mentioned by a number of delegates, including the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, my delegation would like to thank the United States representative for sharing information and an assessment of the first-ever historic United States-Democratic People's Republic of Korea summit in Singapore on 12 June this year, which showcases the importance of dialogue. We congratulate and welcome the success of the summit, in which the two leaders made a clear commitment to work towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, to establish new relations between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and to build a lasting and stable peace regime in the region.

My President mentioned that it is not just a victory for the United States or for North and South Korea, but it is also an achievement of the whole peace-loving international community. Based on the joint statement of the summit, we honestly hope to open a new chapter of history for peace and cooperation, leaving the dark times of war and confrontation of the past behind. What is imperative now is to fully and expeditiously translate commitments made in the joint statement into concrete actions, especially through the follow-up negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang. We have just begun our long journey and we all know that the road ahead will be full of challenges and obstacles. However, we hope that, by pulling together our collective will and wisdom, we will overcome them and finally reach our destination, namely, a denuclearized, peaceful and prosperous Korean Peninsula. In this journey, we will closely work with our neighbouring countries and the international community, including the member States in this chamber. We would like to ask all the delegations in this room to render their continued and strong support and encouragement for our efforts to make new history.

Finally, Mr. President, it is my sincere hope that the progress in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula could in turn give a fresh impetus to revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and delivering on its mandate.

The President: Thank you very much. I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Ono (Japan): Mr. President, at the outset I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and I also assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation throughout your tenure. I would like to express our gratitude to Her Excellency the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria for taking the time to come and speak to this august body. And also, on behalf of the Japanese mission, I would like to thank Ambassador Rowland and Ambassador Biontino for the dedicated and long-term support they have given us.

Mr. President, in February this year, during the Conference on Disarmament high-level segment, the Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Manabu Horii, welcomed the establishment of the five subsidiary bodies. In addition, he introduced three keywords, namely: a more "focused" agenda, a more "formal" approach and a more "flexible" attitude. Thus, I hope, the substantive discussions and deliberations in this subsidiary body will lead to the adoption of a programme of work. The subsidiary body meetings have already reached the midway point and I was personally encouraged to see the quite active interactive discussion yesterday in subsidiary body 1. Japan will deem the discussions successful if value can be added to last year's working group on the way ahead. Keeping the above three keywords in mind, Japan is determined to continue to contribute to the discussions.

Regarding the current situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula, it is highly significant that Chairman Kim Jung-un should reiterate his intentions for complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and made a clear promise to do so in a written document. It is of course necessary to ensure that the outcomes of the United States-North Korea summit lead to concrete actions by North Korea. We will engage in close and

thorough coordination with the United States, as well as with the United States and the Republic of Korea.

The President: Thank you very much. I give the floor to the representative of China, to be followed by the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Li Chunjie (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 also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the four Presidents who preceded you, including Ambassador Aala of Syria, for their positive efforts to advance the work of the Conference. Moreover, we welcome two new ambassadors from Argentina and Morocco who are taking up their duties, and bid farewell to the departing ambassadors of Germany and the United Kingdom.

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, with the joint efforts of the Presidents of the Conference, the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies and all parties concerned, further headway will be made in the discussions under the framework of the subsidiary bodies, and that a report that objectively reflects the discussions and is generally accepted by all parties will eventually be reached. China will continue to make efforts to this end.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you very much. I have on my list Brazil and Australia, and then we will hear the right of reply from the United States of America, then France and the last speaker, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. I suggest that he be the last speaker on this list. If any other delegations wish to take the floor, they may do so at the next meeting. With your permission, we will end the list of speakers there, at 1 p.m.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, as long as the right of reply to our statement is being exercised, I wish to exercise my right to reply once again.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I understand your position, but we must bring the meeting to a close. I do not know how to proceed. I do not think there are specific rules on taking the floor, ending the meeting or putting a stop to States' right to reply. All States have a legitimate right of reply, of course, but we need to end the meeting at 1 p.m. I am willing to keep going if you are, but I do not think that interpretation will be available if we carry on after 1 p.m. I am willing to go on after that time, but I do not know how the other delegations feel about this. I thank the interpreters, who have indicated that they are willing to continue working until 1.10 p.m. Thank you very much. We must finish at 1.10 p.m. in that case. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support.

I also wish to welcome the permanent representatives of Argentina and Morocco into our midst and to assure them of Brazil's cooperation and willingness to work together with their teams towards what I believe is the common goal of us all, that is, making the Conference on Disarmament a valuable forum for disarmament discussions and negotiations again.

I would like to thank the foreign affairs minister of Austria for dedicating a moment of her busy schedule to share with us Austria's positions and views on the most important disarmament challenges of our time. As a co-member with Austria of the core group of countries that mobilized to highlight the catastrophic consequences of any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons and of their mere existence, we are fully aligned with the views presented by the minister on this matter, including the way in which she described and assessed the negotiation and relevance of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Finally, I must say that, having entered the circle of Geneva delegates for disarmament affairs more recently, I was not present for much of the time Ambassadors Rowland and Biontino spent in Geneva representing their respective countries in this august body, but I spent time enough to deeply appreciate the depth of their experience, knowledge, capacity and amicable nature. I wish Ambassadors Rowland and Biontino and their families all the best in their new endeavours.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you very much. I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President, and congratulations on assuming the position of President of the Conference; I look forward to working with you.

Australia welcomes the outcome of the historic summit between United States President Trump and North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un on 12 June. The Singapore Declaration formally reaffirms North Korea's commitment to complete denuclearization made in the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula, of 27 April 2018. The summiteers have stepped in the right direction. We look forward to continued dialogue and diplomacy to achieve these objectives. North Korea must now take concrete and verifiable steps to implement its commitments. It remains bound by United Nations Security Council resolutions banning its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. Australia will continue to work closely with its partners to coordinate actions in support of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Mr. President, I would also just like to finish on a very personal note by thanking Ambassador Rowland and Ambassador Biontino for their service, and by making just two very brief points. I have often spoken in this chamber about the value of mentorship and sharing our expertise with colleagues who have not spent as much time as us in this Conference; I think both of them really epitomize that value. They are also what I would call "lifters" in our community. They have volunteered for multiple positions, they've always done their bit, they have shared their experience and they engaged interactively, and I think we can all learn a lot from the example that they have set us. So I wish to offer them my very sincere thanks.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you for your statement and your kind words for the colleagues who will be leaving us.

(*spoke in English*)

I give the floor to the representative of the United States, who has asked for the right of reply.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. Before exercising my right of reply, I would like to just say a few words about our two departing colleagues. Ambassador Biontino has been a very important colleague for my delegation; he has been a great friend and he will be greatly missed. To my colleague Ambassador Rowland of the United Kingdom, I would like to say that it really has been a pleasure and an honour to work with him so closely here, in the spirit of the special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. I think we have had a very special partnership and he will be sorely missed here, as I think everybody in this room will agree. I know our paths will cross again but I would like him to know that he has a good friend here in Ambassador Wood.

Returning to my right of reply, Mr. President, I will be brief. Syria said it had succeeded in its presidency. I am not sure what it succeeded in. The country is an international pariah, it has no credibility, it has repeatedly violated the Chemical Weapons Convention. If there were any attempts during its presidency to politicize the work of the Conference on Disarmament, they were made by that presidency. Charges of violations to the rules of procedure are just ridiculous. Serious actions have led to a special session of the Conference of States parties taking place right now in The Hague. Syria has violated multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. Its use of chemical weapons against its own people is not in doubt. And, as I have said before, the regime will be held accountable for its crimes against its own people and I will not stop pointing out the

regime's crimes and its violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention – which was negotiated by this very distinguished body. Let me end my right of reply there.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you. I give the floor to the representative of France.

Mr. Riquet (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me first of all to tell you how pleased France is to see Tunisia preside over our meeting. We are convinced that, under your authority and thanks to your experience, this Conference will finally be able to resume a peaceful and constructive dialogue. In any case, you can count on France's full support in your efforts. I would also like to welcome the two new ambassadors who have joined us, the Ambassador of Argentina and the Ambassador of Morocco. I can also assure them of France's full support and cooperation in the performance of their duties.

Mr. President, I would like to respond to the call to become a party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that we heard at the beginning of this meeting. In particular, I would like to clarify that seeking to prohibit nuclear weapons through a treaty that is not binding on any State that actually possesses nuclear weapons will not be effective. This will not reduce nuclear arsenals. This will not enhance the security of any State. This will not contribute to international peace and stability. This initiative may even have the opposite effect and create divisions and disagreement at a time when a unified approach to proliferation and security threats is more necessary than ever. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons runs counter to the current non-proliferation and disarmament framework and risks undermining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which has been at the heart of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts for almost 50 years, along with the system of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards that underpin it. For all these reasons, France does not intend to accede to this instrument. We are not bound by this Treaty or by any new obligations thereunder.

Mr. President, in conclusion, I would like to align myself with the various statements marking the departure of the Ambassadors of Germany and the United Kingdom. France is losing two very close partners today, representatives of two countries with which we have very close relations, but we are also losing two excellent colleagues. Our colleague from Australia expressed it much more eloquently than I. During these long years, we have benefitted from the absolutely remarkable expertise and professionalism of Ambassador Biontino and Ambassador Rowland. I would also like to stress that it has been very pleasant to work with them on a more personal level. Naturally, I would like to express to each of them and their families all my wishes for happiness and all the best for the future in their personal and professional endeavours. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you. I will now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you Mr. President. I would like to begin by congratulating you on assuming the position of President of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation will extend its full support and cooperation to you throughout your term as President.

Since some countries, including Austria, Argentina and Australia, have mentioned my country in their statements – and I have very strong doubts about their true intention or political motivation in picking up only on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for concrete action at a time when we have witnessed really positive signs, with the signing of the two historic documents regarding peace and stability and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula – I would like to respond quickly to their comments by reading out specific paragraphs from these two agreements.

In the Panmunjom Declaration, signed on 27 April, I quote: "The North and the South confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula." In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States Joint Statement signed at the Singapore Summit on 12 June, I quote: "Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." Along with

the North-South summit at Panmunjom, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States summit in Singapore was a focal event of great significance in promoting the current trend towards peace, prosperity and security on the Korean Peninsula and in the world.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is fully committed to establishing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and thus will make every effort to implement the outcomes of these summits. In this regard, the international community should do its utmost to encourage and contribute to accelerating the current positive developments on the Korean Peninsula. Any misled speculation on the prospects of the agreements that undermines the efforts of the States parties concerned, or any attempt to place international condemnation or pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is not acceptable. I would like to advise those delegates who mentioned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in their statements to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea news website and read carefully the full text of the Panmunjom Declaration and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States Joint Statement concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's commitments.

Since Japan is not a signatory to either of these documents, they would be well advised to refrain from poking their noses into other people's business.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to exercise his right of reply.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. I will be brief. Listening to the representative of the United States, I was reminded of Franz Kafka who once called into question those who took action based on the logic of political necessity rather than the logic of fact, saying that they were afflicted by delusions which they turned into universal principles. I say to the United States Ambassador that whoever told him, while he was outside this chamber, that we were politicizing issues inside the chamber misled him. With regard to upholding the rules of procedure, I am not sure whether we are reading from the same rules of procedure. Perhaps we should discuss this issue at future sessions.

Lastly, Mr. President, although the Chemical Weapons Convention was discussed and negotiated by this Conference, the Convention established a separate organization to monitor its implementation. I believe that that organization, and not this Conference, is the most suitable forum for discussing the accusations raised by the United States Ambassador. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): Dear colleagues, as I mentioned at the beginning of the meeting, at our next meeting I will invite delegations to engage in a discussion on the Agenda for Disarmament that the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented in Geneva on 24 May, including the opportunities that this Agenda presents for the Conference on Disarmament.

In order to give delegations enough time to prepare, I suggest that we hold our next plenary meeting only on Tuesday 7 August, and postpone the meeting scheduled for 31 July to a later date, 9 August. We are not cancelling the meeting of 31 July, but postponing it in order, as I have indicated, to give delegations sufficient time to reflect and prepare their comments on the Secretary-General's report on the Agenda for Disarmament, notwithstanding the fact that the subsidiary bodies will continue their work. Our discussions will serve to enrich the debate and will examine new perspectives in order to take advantage of the current momentum in the Conference on Disarmament and, of course, I am very much counting on your cooperation on this matter. Does that suit you?

I see no objection. So we will work as I have indicated. I now give the floor to the Secretariat for some announcements.

Ms. Mercogliano (Acting Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): I simply wanted to remind you of the upcoming meetings of the subsidiary bodies for this week. In light of the time constraints, I invite you all to check the website and follow us on Twitter, as we tweet every single meeting and continue sending email reminders to missions. I will see most, if not all, of you here at 3 p.m., for the second meeting of subsidiary body 1.

The President (*spoke in French*): That concludes our work this morning, as well as the work of the second part of the 2018 session of the Conference on Disarmament. I thank you for your contributions and I also thank the interpreters. I will see you at the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.