

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 14 August 2018, at 10.10 a.m.

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

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The President (*speak in Arabic*): I call to order the 1465th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, Ms. Kaspersen, ladies and gentlemen, I would like at the outset to thank everyone for contributing to the important discussion we had during our previous meeting. Also allow me, on behalf of the Conference and my delegation, to extend a warm welcome to our new colleagues, Ambassador Peter Beerwerth, Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament, and Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Permanent Representative of Myanmar in Geneva, both of whom have recently taken up their duties in Geneva. I wish the new Ambassadors every success.

Dear colleagues, as I announced at our last meeting, we will today continue our discussion of issues relating to the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament, including the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, which many delegations commented on at the previous meeting. I wish to reiterate that this discussion will help the presidency to carry out its main task which, as things currently stand, is to prepare a programme of work for the Conference.

I wish to inform you that, after we have heard your statements during this morning's formal meeting, I will submit a proposal in the form of a draft decision which, I believe, has been distributed to you by the secretariat. The proposal will be based on the consultations I have conducted regarding the preparation of a programme of work for the Conference. I will then end this formal meeting and convene an informal meeting to hear your views, comments and questions on the proposal.

(*speak in French*)

I propose that we first listen to the delegations who wish to take the floor during this formal meeting before we continue our deliberations in an informal setting in order to discuss draft decision CD/WP.609, which was circulated to all delegations this morning by the secretariat. We shall now begin our deliberations and listen to all delegations who wish to take the floor.

(*speak in English*)

I now turn to English because a high representative of the Government of the United States of America will now address the Conference on Disarmament. Ms. Yleem D.S. Poblete is Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance. I will now suspend this formal meeting in order to allow Ms. Poblete to join us. The meeting is suspended.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Distinguished colleagues, I have the pleasure of introducing Ms. Yleem D.S. Poblete, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance of the United States of America. Your Excellency, you have the floor.

Ms. Poblete (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to bring to the attention of this body a matter related to outer space that is of great concern to my Government and that relates to space security.

Outer space is a frontier that inspires us and unites us more than anything else. Photographs of faraway galaxies inspire us to dream big. New discoveries about the planets in our solar system that help us unlock mysteries here on Earth stretch our minds beyond the limits of our earthbound existence. And every rocket that we launch proves that the sky is not the limit.

What we choose to do in space, as on every frontier, plays a vital role in the lives of our people and the future of our nations here on Earth. It accelerates scientific discovery, spurs ground-breaking innovations, fuels our economies, and, quite literally, creates the jobs of the future. In the United States, in the Mojave Desert, there is a company that will carry the first generation of space tourists to the edge of the Earth's atmosphere to peer into the cosmic expanse. And, as we continue to push further into our own solar system, new businesses and entire enterprises will be built to seize the infinite possibilities before us.

However, at the same time, Earth's most valuable orbits are becoming increasingly congested. The sheer number of space objects in these orbits increases the possibility of unintentional accidents and magnifies the risks to all our nations' capabilities. Add to these concerns the possibility of intentional acts of aggression in space and we are faced with a very serious situation indeed.

Like many countries represented here, the United States would prefer the space domain to remain free of conflict. We remain concerned about the challenges of irresponsible behaviour, behaviour that may result in dangerous misinterpretations and miscalculations and could be seen as destabilizing and escalatory in a crisis or a conflict. The United States' new National Space Strategy calls for protection of our vital interests in space and stronger safety, stability and sustainability of our space activities. On 18 June this year, President Donald Trump directed the United States Department of Defense to immediately begin the process necessary to establish a space force as the sixth branch of the United States Armed Forces. Why? As Vice-President Pence said last week, "Other nations increasingly possess the capability to operate in space. Not all of them, however, share our commitment to freedom, to private property and to the rule of law. So, as we continue to carry American leadership in space, so also will we carry America's commitment to freedom on this new frontier." As the Vice-President also said, "Our adversaries have transformed space into a war-fighting domain already. And the United States will not shrink from this challenge. Under President Trump's leadership, we will meet it head on to defend our nation. America will always seek peace, in space as on Earth. But history has proven that peace only comes through strength. And in the realm of outer space, the United States Space Force will be that strength in the years ahead."

Mr. President, as this body well knows, the United States has raised concerns over many years that the Russian Federation is actively pursuing the development and deployment of anti-satellite weapons. Since 2009, Russian Ministry of Defence officials have repeatedly and publicly confirmed that anti-satellite weapons development is being conducted in Russia. As recently as February 2017, a Russian Air Force squadron commander stated that Russia is developing new missiles with the express intent of destroying satellites. Furthermore, we have read statements from the Russian Ministry of Defence that it is working on creating a mobile attack anti-satellite system. The Russian Ministry of Defence recently announced that its space troops have received a mobile laser system, which Vladimir Putin announced to the world on 1 March of this year. Russia's leader has himself alluded to space weapons being more acceptable in the political and military respect.

During Mr. Putin's State of the Nation speech on 1 March 2018, he unveiled no less than six new major offensive weapon systems. And who can forget Russia's months of denials about a nuclear-powered torpedo, only to have Mr. Putin then officially acknowledge the development of a nuclear-powered underwater vehicle, along with other weapons such as laser systems? The Russian pursuit of counterspace capabilities is consistent with these other activities and is disturbing given the recent pattern of Russian malign behaviour.

This behaviour continues, despite the Russian Federation stating many times that it places a high priority on the promotion of the draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, and having, with its partner China, sought to start negotiations on the draft Treaty in this very body. As recently as this past February, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov announced to this body that the prevention of an arms race in outer space remains a priority for Russia.

The United States has clearly articulated the many flaws of this draft Treaty. We also note that the need to understand unusual or even potentially threatening behaviour, where a satellite is observed doing something that is contrary to what its owners claim it is intended to do, is of great concern to us. This is important because not only do these actions create uncertainty for other satellite operations, but they also create uncertainty concerning the intentions of the satellite's owners or operators. What Russia tells us diplomatically and publicly may be the opposite of what it intends to do with that satellite. And this is why

transparency and clarity of intentions are so important to fostering trust and confidence in situations in which the time to respond may be very short.

In this context, the United States delegation would like to bring to your attention recent outer space activities by the Russian Ministry of Defence that appear to be contrary to the provisions of its own draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and to the Russian political commitment not to be the first to place weapons in outer space, in line with the “No first placement of weapons in outer space” initiative. These recent activities by the Russian satellites underscore critical fallacies in the logic and language of the proposed Treaty and raise questions about the transparency of Russian space operations and programmes. For the United States, this information strengthens our belief that the proposed Treaty has major flaws that make it unviable and demonstrates that any space arms control agreement is unverifiable at this time.

Mr. President, in October of last year, the Russian Ministry of Defence deployed a space object they claimed was a space apparatus inspector. But its behaviour on-orbit was inconsistent with anything seen before from on-orbit inspection or space situational awareness capabilities, including other Russian inspection satellite activities. We are concerned about what appears to be very abnormal behaviour by a declared “space apparatus inspector”. We do not know for certain what it is and there is no way to verify it. But Russian intentions with respect to this satellite are unclear and are obviously a very troubling development, particularly when considered in concert with statements by Russia’s Space Force Commander, who highlighted that assimilating new prototypes of weapons into Space Forces’ military units is a main task facing the Aerospace Defence Forces space troops.

Now I can tell you that our Russian colleagues will deny that its systems are meant to be hostile. The Russian Ministry of Defence has put out a press release stating these are simply inspector satellites. So the question before this body is: how do we verify what countries say their spacecraft are doing? What would be enough information to prove what the purpose of an object is? We have pointed out Russian satellite behaviour that is inconsistent with what Russia claims it is, a so-called inspector satellite not acting in a manner consistent with a satellite designed to conduct safe and responsible inspection operations.

But it is difficult to determine an object’s true purpose simply by observing it on-orbit, unlike inspection for a traditional arms control agreement. Based on the drafting of the treaty language by Russia, there is nothing in the proposed draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space that would prohibit this sort of activity or the developing, testing or stockpiling of anti-satellite weapons capabilities, so long as it does not cause damage to another object in space. The only certainty we have is that this system has been placed in orbit. The rest of its demonstrated behaviour is unexpected and unclear to us. So that leads to the question of whether this is enough information to verify and assess whether a weapon has or has not been tested in orbit. The United States does not believe it is: because we have no means of differentiating the behaviour of many objects from that of a weapon, outer space arms control is unverifiable.

Regardless of whether you share the concerns of the United States or believe Russia’s stated purpose for these satellites, this example raises fundamental, concrete questions concerning our ability to discern the intentions behind one country’s actions in space. To the United States, this is yet further proof that the Russian actions do not match their words, that the draft Treaty’s proponents, through very careful parsing of treaty language, would allow the very activities they claim to seek to prohibit.

So, how does the proposed Treaty reduce the potential for conflict from extending into outer space or prevent destabilizing activities? The short answer is that it does not. In view of Russian non-compliance with its arms control commitments, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, all of which are easier to verify than counter-space weapons development and/or deployment, is this inconsistent behaviour I have noted what we might expect in the future if the draft Treaty were negotiated and entered into force?

This is why responsible nations should be considering the practical implementation of voluntary transparency and confidence-building measures and developing norms of responsible behaviour for outer space activities, rather than pursuing a protracted and contentious legally binding treaty.

Mr. President, the United States has serious concerns about the activities of the Russian Government in developing anti-satellite weapons, which we have shared many times in this forum. Suffice it to say, my remarks today have touched on just one of many similarly questionable actions we have seen over the years.

Dear colleagues, we must take concrete steps to strengthen the safety, stability and sustainability of space. Hollow and hypocritical efforts are not the answer. The draft Treaty is not the right mechanism for accomplishing that. It is a flawed document, proposed by a country that has routinely violated its international commitments. The United States looks forward to continuing to engage constructively and pragmatically with other United Nations Member States in order to strengthen the safety, the stability and the sustainability of outer space activities. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you, your Excellency. I would like to wish you a very good stay and very fruitful work in Geneva. Now we will suspend the meeting to let Her Excellency leave the room.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President (spoke in Arabic): Dear colleagues, we will continue our formal meeting by giving the floor to delegations that wish to speak. I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament, the newly appointed Ambassador Peter Beerwerth.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, after three challenging years in Ramallah as the German Permanent Representative there, I have the pleasure to return to the arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation world. As the new Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to assure you, Mr. President, of my delegation's full support under your able stewardship. And likewise, I would like to extend sincere greetings to all my colleagues here in the room and pledge my full cooperation in our common effort to move our, not always easy, dossiers forward.

Coming to an arena like this one, just shortly before the game is over, so to speak, is not easy. Nevertheless, I would like to reassure you, Mr. President, and all the delegations here, that I will do my utmost to contribute to a positive and successful outcome of this season, which started with augmented expectations. I certainly look forward to, and hope for, the adoption of a meaningful final report that will give us guidance for the future.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, we are all aware of the fact that in the Conference on Disarmament we do not operate in a political vacuum. The current challenges are substantial and include, to name but a few, the issue of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – to which we, Germany, of course, strongly adhere – and chemical weapons in Syria. The realities that surround us were captured and described by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his recent Geneva speech. His ideas may provide good food for thought. Germany is ready to support the Secretary-General on that road and very much hopes for the establishment of a broad coalition of countries to move disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts forward.

Germany's new Government has, unsurprisingly, put the search for peace, global security and disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation very high on its agenda, thus following a long-standing German policy tradition. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, my foreign minister, Heiko Maas, stated that "maintaining a stable architecture of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation is key for the very survival of humanity". And he also strongly reiterated our commitment to reach a "global zero".

Here in the Conference on Disarmament, our unwavering commitment to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation has been translated into a number of initiatives and proposals and we hope that they will come to fruition. But new challenges have been arriving. I believe the most important ones we need to address are: new technologies; new weapons of mass destruction based on artificial intelligence and autonomous systems; the risk of cyberwarfare, and how to mitigate and eliminate it; and the risks emanating from the breathtaking advances being made in the life sciences.

We need to deal with all these in the context of a norms-based international order and international institutions, of which the Conference on Disarmament is a crucial pillar. We need a continued and intensified dialogue among States, but also with civil society, to enhance confidence. In that vein, I am happy that we will have an opportunity to engage with civil society this coming Friday. And we need an ever firmer conviction that we can only create security by cooperating with each other.

Drawing to a close, Mr. President, I would like to reassure you and all my colleagues here that Germany will continue to contribute its share for the Conference on Disarmament to meet its current challenges. In that vein, I look forward to working with you all and hope for a successful end to the 2018 session. Thank you very much.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you very much, Ambassador, for the comments you made and the issues you raised. We are confident that, by joining the Conference at this time, you will be able to make an important contribution that will be of great interest to other delegations. I will now give the floor to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Myanmar, Mr. Kyaw Moe Tun.

Mr. Tun (Myanmar): Thank you, Mr. President. Since this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor under your presidency, please allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to register Myanmar's support for and cooperation with you and your team as you preside over the deliberations of the Conference on Disarmament. I also would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for the work of the previous president of the Conference. I am delighted to assume my duty in Geneva representing Myanmar and participating in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. As I am no stranger to this Conference, I am very happy to come back here to work with you all on disarmament-related matters. I was here from 2012 to 2015. I look forward to working closely with all of you to achieve our common goal of a world free from nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, as we all know, the Conference on Disarmament is the world's only multilateral disarmament negotiating body but, since the conclusion of the negotiation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996, the Conference on Disarmament has remained in deadlock. It is with the flexibility of the members of the Conference on Disarmament that a consensus on a programme of work can be reached. Despite its lack of progress, the Conference on Disarmament is, in our delegation's opinion, the best and only multilateral negotiation forum for disarmament. I strongly believe that we need to keep on trying, to keep searching for a collective way forward and commonalities and to make progress on the substantive work on the agenda, even when we have our own priorities. In this connection, I would like to extend my appreciation to the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies for their hard work.

Mr. President, nuclear disarmament has been a principle objective for the United Nations since the adoption of the first General Assembly resolutions. It is the highest priority for Myanmar on its disarmament agenda. We will continue to pursue the policy of total elimination of nuclear weapons. With regard to the draft decision, Mr. President, we would like to express our deep appreciation to you and your team for all your hard work. Myanmar can go along with the consensus.

Mr. President, let me conclude by underlining that the Conference on Disarmament has a number of urgent and important issues for negotiation if it is to achieve the disarmament goal. Together with others, Myanmar will continue searching for solutions that will help achieve this goal and we will continue to be actively engaged in all relevant disarmament forums. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you very much for your kind words regarding this presidency. We are sure that your presence here will, as is customary with Myanmar, be a positive addition. I recall that Myanmar's presidency was significant and serious. We are you sure that you will continue in that vein, and we count on your cooperation to help us achieve progress in the work of the Conference. I shall now move on to the next delegation. It is my pleasure to give the floor to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Mr. Jorge Valero.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*speak in Spanish*): As this is the first time that my delegation has spoken under your presidency, we would like to express our support for your endeavours. We appreciate the efforts made by the Presidents of the Conference during the first and second parts of this year. Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to general and complete disarmament and non-proliferation. Achieving this objective is essential to strengthening the right to international peace and security. We would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to the work carried out by the various coordinators of the subsidiary bodies established pursuant to the decision contained in document CD/2119. We would like to make special reference to the discussions in subsidiary body 5 on new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons, in line with document CD/2126. We would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Belarus, Ambassador Yury Ambrazhevich, in his capacity as coordinator of this subsidiary body, and his team for presenting the information paper setting out the principal outcomes of its deliberations.

The debate on autonomous weapons systems has been intensifying and there are a number of concerns about how these weapons could change the nature of war in the future. An absence of human intervention will make future wars more inhumane. We want discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems to be conducted in an open, transparent and universally participatory manner. This will ensure the involvement of the international community in the evolution of the debate. The establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems by the Fifth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons demonstrates the international community's concern regarding the accelerated refinement, modernization, rapid advancement and complexity of these technologies.

In the ministerial declaration of the Eighteenth Midterm Ministerial Meeting of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, in April this year, the ministers present considered that "lethal autonomous weapons systems raise a number of ethical, legal, moral and technical, as well as international peace- and security-related questions which should be thoroughly deliberated and examined in the context of conformity to international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law".

The use of technology must be devoted to the progress of humanity. However, with regard to human control, we emphasize that machines cannot be entrusted with the power to decide on the life or death of a human being without any kind of human intervention. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expresses its concern not only at the growing use, in a manner inconsistent with the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, but also at the lack of international regulation of so-called semi-autonomous weapons, such as military air vehicles, semi-automatic weapons and unmanned vehicles or drones, given the implications of their use and the damage they cause to the civilian population and infrastructure of the countries where they are used.

The pain and suffering that these new technologies could cause if not regulated is incalculable. The risk of proliferation is high. There is a clear threat to peace and development and a risk of an arms race and the use of such weapons by terrorist groups, which could increase the instability of the international and regional community.

Mr. President, recently, on 4 August 2018, an assassination attempt took place in Venezuela against President Nicolás Maduro and the country's highest civil and military authorities. It was the first time in history that drones were used in an assassination attempt. According to the competent national authorities, two M600 drones were used in this

terrorist act. Each drone contained 1 kg of a highly lethal explosive called C-4, which had the capacity to affect a large area around where the President was located.

Although President Nicolás Maduro and the high authorities present were not assassinated, eight members of the Bolivarian National Guard were injured. This terrorist act has been widely condemned by national political opinion and by peace-loving governments. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, stated that this organization – and I quote – rejects any act of violence in Venezuela and is concerned by the recent attempt on the life of President Nicolás Maduro – end of quote. The international solidarity with Venezuela and the world's interest in peace in my country is evident. In this context, we wish to reaffirm that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes the importance of the existing norms and principles of international humanitarian law and is convinced of the need to establish specific regulations in the form of a new legally binding instrument that takes into account the damage that may be caused by the use of this category of weapons.

We are talking about an instrument regulating the use of lethal autonomous systems and the use of semi-automatic weapons, such as unmanned aerial military vehicles or drones. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons is the appropriate forum to adopt this instrument. Venezuela, as a peace-loving country, is in favour of prohibiting the development, acquisition, trade, deployment and use of lethal autonomous weapons systems and reiterates its commitment to this forum and to multilateralism. Peace is of paramount importance and is the legitimate aspiration of all peoples. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you, Ambassador. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America, Mr. Wood. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Wood (United States): Thank you, Mr. President. I listened with interest to the comments made during the 7 August plenary meeting regarding the Agenda for Disarmament of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, entitled “Securing Our Common Future”. Although Washington has provided me with detailed comments on the Agenda, I would like today to share some more of my Government's more general thoughts.

Let me first start by saying that the United States is committed to global stability and peace and security and shares the Secretary-General's concern regarding the deteriorating security environment. Countering proliferation is central to the maintenance of international peace and security and also remains essential for preserving an international environment that is conducive to disarmament.

The Secretary-General's Agenda rightly highlights the importance of ensuring that the existing norms against chemical and biological weapons are respected and that any use of such weapons is investigated and those responsible are identified and held accountable. The Secretary-General also recognizes the seriousness of the threat posed by biological weapons, whether in the hands of a State or a non-State actor. We were especially pleased that he proposes to translate this into concrete action. Strengthening the United Nations' capacity to investigate allegations of biological weapons use, and its ability to mount an effective, coordinated response in the event that these horrific weapons are used, is certainly a step in the right direction. While we do not believe that a legally binding verification regime would be effective, we should certainly improve our ability to investigate specific allegations of such use.

In the Secretary-General's assessment of the deteriorating conditions in today's international security environment, he suggests that a lack of disarmament efforts is among the root causes. But the lack of disarmament is not a cause, it is a symptom. Disarmament and arms control have always been a lagging indicator of the prevailing security environment. As the United States posits in the paper entitled “Creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament” it presented at the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Geneva in April and May 2018, the current deteriorating environment requires States to first address the real underlying security concerns. It is these security concerns that have made the retention of nuclear weapons necessary to forestall conflict between the

major Powers and maintain strategic stability. Unfortunately, these deteriorating security conditions have made near-term prospects for progress on disarmament bleak.

Disarmament does not occur in a vacuum, Mr. President. Its progress depends upon the willingness of all States to engage in a meaningful dialogue that addresses the security concerns that lead States to acquire additional arms. States are more likely to conclude that disarming is consistent with their national interest if they are confident that international tension is decreasing and their progress on disarmament will not be destabilizing. Therefore, at this point in time, before pursuing disarmament, as suggested in the Secretary-General's Agenda, we believe the international community should work assiduously to improve the global security environment, thereby creating the conditions for disarmament. However, this does not mean that all conditions must be perfect before nuclear arsenals can be further reduced, or that nuclear disarmament should cease being an objective. In fact, the 2018 United States Nuclear Posture Review reaffirms that the United States remains committed to arms control efforts that advance United States, allied and partner security, are verifiable and enforceable and include partners that comply responsibly with their obligations.

If further disarmament progress is to be made, then it will be essential to address the current trust and confidence deficit. To this end, the Secretary-General proposes that substantive and results-oriented dialogue is key to resolving our current stalemate and that the restoration of trust and confidence among member States can be accomplished through such dialogue. Our "Creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament" initiative can help in this endeavour. By launching a serious dialogue on the geopolitical impediments to further progress and considering effective measures to increase trust and confidence among States, we can begin to create the conditions for realizing our shared interest in a more peaceful and safer world. When considering the Secretary-General's Agenda, Mr. President, it is useful to remember that member States drive the disarmament agenda and we welcome the Secretary-General's responsiveness to that call.

The Agenda's objectives should reflect the wishes of all member States. We recognize, of course, that the Agenda draws upon the wishes of member States, as reflected in part by resolutions adopted annually by the General Assembly. And it goes without saying that, while the United States supports a number of resolutions adopted in the First Committee, it does not support them all. As such, there are a number of identified actions and the rationale for them to which we can offer our support, but there are also elements in the Agenda that my Government has not endorsed and will not endorse.

For example, the document lends support to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which many States, including all the nuclear-weapon States, have not supported. The Agenda also asserts the failure of multilateral arms control organizations, when the real reason for failure lies with certain States and the inability to agree on a common way ahead. The alternative of subjecting security concerns to a vote in the General Assembly is not one the United States can support. Nor do we agree with the Secretary-General's assertion of an alleged new cold war. As the 2018 United States Nuclear Posture Review makes clear, today there are large States "contesting the international norms and order" that the United States has worked "with our allies, partners and members of the international community to build and sustain". The Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament tends to lump the behaviour and values of the responsible large Powers into the same bad actor basket with which we do not agree. We are not all the same and we are not equally to blame for the decreasing lack of trust and confidence in the current international security environment.

We note, Mr. President, with some concern, that this Agenda for Disarmament takes separate parts of the overarching security equation, such as the international humanitarian law of armed conflict, the arms trade, humanitarian demining and explosive ordnance disposal, and reinvents them as so-called tools of disarmament. We do not necessarily see this as helpful to ongoing discussions in programmes on these topics. We also note that these actions seem designed primarily for action by the Secretary-General and the Office for Disarmament Affairs, often in partnership with related bodies such as the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Mine Action Team, and that these actions can and will be subject to some kind of implementation plan and progress monitoring. This raises questions about the role of member States and guiding actions and possible financial implications in their

implementation. We would support language that had the Secretary-General supporting and collaborating with member States. On some of these issues, there are already ongoing discussions and actions. We wish to ensure that there is no duplication of effort.

Mr. President, these are some initial and more general reactions of the United States to the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament. We will share more detailed comments on some of the specific actions as this discussion continues here and in New York. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you very much, Ambassador, for your statement and your comments on the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament. We hope that other statements will be made on this topic, as they will help the Presidency and the Conference find appropriate solutions for dealing with issues raised by the Secretary-General that fall within the remit of the Conference. Of course, our main objective continues to be the preparation of a programme of work. Thank you very much. I now to give the floor to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, Mr. Gabriëlse.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me start by congratulating you on your assumption of the important role of President of the Conference on Disarmament. We commend you for all your efforts, including your suggestions on the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Rest assured of my delegation's full support. Let me also warmly welcome our new colleagues from Germany and Myanmar.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union last week here in the Conference on Disarmament on the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda entitled "Securing Our Common Future: an Agenda for Disarmament" and will make the following remarks in its national capacity.

We were pleased and felt privileged to witness the launch by the Secretary-General, António Guterres himself, of his Agenda for Disarmament on 24 May 2018, here in Geneva. The Netherlands welcomes his personal engagement and focus on the topic. Indeed, the topic is timely as cold war tensions reappear in a world that is more complex today. The Netherlands therefore supports the aims set out in the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament and shares the conviction underlying it that renewed effort is needed to address these issues. We also continue to support the role of the United Nations as central to these efforts. The Netherlands is, in this context, in favour of discussing the issue here in the Conference on Disarmament and supports the proposal by the Tunisian presidency to establish an informal working group on this matter. This Conference on Disarmament, by its name alone, deals with disarmament. So discussing how the United Nations shapes this important topic together with its member States is relevant and necessary. We are keen to contribute to this ongoing discussion in the Conference on Disarmament and elsewhere.

Now I would like to mention a few areas along the lines of the three parts – disarmament to save humanity, disarmament that saves lives and disarmament for future generations – mentioned in the Secretary-General's Agenda. These are highlights and, hence, not a complete overview of the Netherland's position on the diverse range of issues mentioned in the Agenda for Disarmament. I will start with nuclear disarmament.

Firstly, for the Netherlands, it is important to have a common vision of a pathway towards a world free of nuclear weapons. In that context, we believe it is necessary to start talking about the building blocks of a world without nuclear weapons. Additionally, we should consider external factors that influence the pace of disarmament, such as the international security environment, and seek solutions to optimize the circumstances for disarmament. The 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference outcome should therefore include a renewed and common vision on nuclear disarmament towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. Banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices is an important step towards that goal. The Netherlands welcomes the substantive discussions we had on this topic in the Conference on Disarmament this year. One of the building blocks that will be absolutely crucial for the elimination of nuclear weapons is robust options for nuclear disarmament verification. Discussing and developing such options is a real and tangible contribution to the disarmament process that we are engaged in right now through the International Partnership

for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. The Netherlands would like to see these initiatives being fully supported by the Conference on Disarmament.

Risk reduction should also be a priority; it is necessary to minimize the chance of any nuclear weapons use for whatever reason. The Netherlands has commissioned research on this issue and is now looking at the next steps, focusing on options related to increasing various forms of transparency, improving communication channels and encouraging dialogue on nuclear doctrines, and we had a good discussion on these topics in subsidiary body 2.

Secondly, the Netherlands agrees that it is important to focus on disarmament that saves lives and, in particular, to integrate disarmament into the peace and security pillar of the United Nations and to link it with our efforts on sustainable development. We were pleased to have contributed, with a group of countries, to suggestions to the Secretary-General for this part of his agenda. In this context, we would like to highlight the important role of mine action. Humanitarian demining contributes to stability, reconstruction and socioeconomic development. In addition, demining is a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as acknowledged by the Secretary-General.

The work we do in the context of conventional weapons disarmament and all the relevant conventions and protocols is a crucial starting point for our global efforts and norm-setting in the field of these types of weapons. As mentioned in his report, they have promoted transparency, confidence and stability, reducing the military burden on societies. They have ensured respect for the principles of humanity and they have prevented diversion to malicious or unauthorized users.

In line with the United Nations activities on prevention and reduction of risks from the increasing use of improvised explosive devices, the Netherlands has been involved in activities such as technical surveys, mine risk education and clearance. The Netherlands contributes to the United Nations' activities and works with mine action NGOs that are active in a large number of countries. We share the concerns about the increasing use of improvised explosive devices, many of which are anti-personnel mines, by both States and non-State actors. We have been emphasizing this in our international assistance policy on mines and related projects and programmes.

Lastly, the Netherlands welcomes the Secretary-General's engagement with member States to help foster a culture of accountability and adherence to emerging norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour in cyberspace. The Secretary-General's engagement could contribute to renewed momentum in the discussion among member States on this issue.

Over the past few years, United Nations Member States have already made important progress in contributing to stability in cyberspace, especially through two landmark Group of Governmental Experts consensus reports. These resolved some of the more fundamental questions on the use of information and telecommunications technologies by States in the context of international security. However, there have been setbacks. Malicious activity in cyberspace is still incentivized by an impression of impunity. It still occurs too regularly and with little apparent thought about the consequences for civilians and civil society. Therefore, engagement among the United Nations membership is crucial. Many more actors need to be involved, of course, to ensure a sustainable and stable cyberspace. Cyberspace is exemplified by the outsized role of non-State actors. Stakeholders from the private sector, civil society and academia all have responsibility for the cyberspace that we want to leave behind for future generations. These parties should also be involved in the discussion. Therefore, referring to the last part of the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, we also support the strengthening of partnerships for disarmament.

Mr. President, we would like to thank you again for suggesting addressing the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament here in the Conference on Disarmament. As we indicated, we would support further discussion on the different strands in more detail in the Conference, in particular in view of the implementation plan the United Nations is

working on. We, the member States, are the United Nations and we see this as part of a collective effort on the important issue of disarmament. Thank you.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you, Ambassador, for your valuable statement. Thank you also for your support for the efforts of this presidency, the ultimate aim of which is to benefit the Conference. As usual, we look forward to receiving your valuable and active contributions to help advance the Conference's work. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, Mr. Alexander Deyneko.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*speak in Russian*): In our statement last week, we set out in some detail our position regarding the discussion in the Conference on Disarmament of the Agenda of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I do not wish to return to this subject. But our delegation has been left with no choice other than to exercise its right of reply. So I would like to make the following remarks.

We fully agree with the Permanent Representative of the United States regarding the need for dialogue on disarmament affairs. Moreover, we are ready for a dialogue of this kind. But we have serious doubts in this regard, doubts which, I believe, are shared by other delegations that heard the opening statement by the American representative, a senior official in the United States Department of State.

Generally speaking, we heard nothing new: the same blend of allegations founded on suspicions, assumptions and so forth. There is a very good Russian proverb, although I am not sure whether the interpreters will be able to translate it into the other languages of the United Nations: when you start seeing things, you should cross yourself. You should not construct your entire policy on them. In any case, Russian diplomacy constructs its policy on specific facts, and only those that have been reliably verified by multiple sources, at that. That is the first point.

Secondly, I might have been able to agree with some of the claims levelled against Russia. No one is perfect. We are all people, and we all make mistakes. But I could only have done so if the statement in question had been made by a delegation that respected international legal standards, not by representatives of the United States, a country that has set a poor example of compliance with international law. I will not give any examples – they are so numerous that they would take up the rest of the meeting. I will mention only one, the most recent and most flagrant. This is the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran. But it gets worse. The fact is that the Plan of Action was approved by a resolution of the United Nations Security Council, which means that, in this case, two fundamental texts of international law on arms control and non-proliferation have been violated, or even ignored. In such a context, can we really speak of the commitment of the United States to arms control?

As for the other accusations that the Department of State representative made regarding Russian conduct that supposedly constitutes a violation of international legal instruments, let us rewind a little, to around 15 or 16 years ago. None of this began today. All processes begin somewhere. In 2002, the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which was the keystone or fundamental pillar of strategic parity between the USSR-Russia and the United States, and began developing a global anti-ballistic missile system, including a European segment. Legally speaking, there are no claims to be made. The Americans acted in accordance with the bilateral agreement. But I stress that this action undermined the basis on which strategic parity between the two great Powers rested.

At the time, the Russian Federation said that, if a political and diplomatic solution could not be found, we would be forced to look for a military and technical one. We tried. We made unbelievable efforts. We proposed creating an integrated anti-ballistic missile system in Europe in response to the so-called Iranian nuclear missile threat. We proposed many other alternatives. We proposed concluding a different agreement instead. Nothing worked. So the military and technical option is all that we were left with.

The President of the Russian Federation spoke about this in his address on 1 March. But he said nothing about outer space. What the President did say in his statement was that the new weapons are all being developed in strict compliance with the obligations of the

Russian Federation with respect to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and that our American partners would be duly informed in accordance with those agreements. What claims can there be against us?

I will not go into the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces. The subject is rather tiresome and is brought up constantly. I will talk about the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). What is the CFE Treaty? I believe that those present in the room know rather little about the instrument. As far as I recall, it was signed in 1990, when Europe was divided into two military and political blocs, and the CFE Treaty reinforced this division. Much has since changed, but the Treaty still stands. In 1999, the so-called Adapted CFE Treaty was concluded. It was supposed to have been signed by the newly formed countries that later joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But it was not. We waited for a long time. We were counting on the good judgment of our partners but, as ever, our hopes were dashed. No one ratified the Adapted CFE Treaty. A gap emerged in European security, and we were once again left with no other choice, but we did not begin the process of withdrawing from the CFE Treaty, like the Americans. We refrained from doing so in the hope that our partners might come round to the idea of negotiating a new instrument.

As for the Chemical Weapons Convention, there is nothing at all to be said. In September 2017, nearly three years earlier than scheduled, the Russian Federation completed the elimination of its chemical weapons programme and destroyed all its chemical weapons stockpiles under the strict and effective international control of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). There is a separate statement on the matter. To give you some idea, we are talking about the largest chemical weapons arsenal in the world, something like 40,000 tons of chemical warfare agents. You can imagine the extent of the work involved. Incidentally, despite being an economically more developed country and purporting to be a leader in the field of disarmament, the United States has yet to destroy its chemical weapons stockpiles, which happen to be much smaller in size.

But that is not the main point. The main point is the most recent OPCW decision adopted by a so-called relative majority of votes. I am talking about the establishment of an attributive mechanism. Russia believes this decision to be illegitimate, as it is not based on the Convention. There is no article in the Convention providing for the establishment of such a mechanism. Rather than passing a decision that demonstrably contradicts the Convention, and doing so by a crude arithmetical majority, it would have made sense to have first made the necessary amendments to the Convention. What is at stake here? What are we talking about? How can we talk about respect for international law if, by a simple vote, we can effectively call into question the fundamental principles of the non-proliferation regime for weapons of mass destruction? Incidentally, we have never walked away from the dialogue.

I can offer you another example. You hear a great deal about Russian interference in American and other elections, attempts to undermine Western democracy, cyberthreats and much else besides. Anyway, the idea was floated of setting up a joint cybersecurity group to examine these issues specifically, at a professional level. They would have sat down to work out who was right and who was wrong, without microphones, without the needless public drama. Well? No. We do not want to. We will instead switch on the microphone and accuse Russia once more. And proof? There is none. We just know – so there.

As the Americans and their security services are all well aware, this was made clear by the experience in Iraq. Prove otherwise. Because, two years afterwards, a commission acknowledged, before the United States Congress, that there had been no weapons of mass destruction or that none had been found. Maybe they did not look hard enough; I do not know.

As for the draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and the accusations made in that regard, this is a common ruse in certain diplomatic circles. You would think that, if the American delegation had had such serious concerns about the conduct of Russia, it would have been the first to support the Russian-Chinese initiative and, moreover, would have played an active role in developing the draft, which would have fully

satisfied the security interests of America and made a constructive contribution. If you do not like the anti-ballistic missile systems, which you believe could be used as anti-satellite weapons, then raise the issue, make the necessary corrections to the draft, and we can begin negotiating. No one – not only the United States, but no other delegation – has submitted an alternative draft or any other initiative. Our American colleagues do nothing but criticize us. This is not a difficult position to take. You can do nothing and criticize others.

We and our Chinese colleagues have never claimed that our draft is perfect. We have always called upon all delegations to comprehensively discuss and improve it. We have noted repeatedly that the draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space has a specific aim, which consists of two simple obligations. The first is no first placement of strike weapons in space, and the second is no use of force against outer space objects. We have been absolutely transparent in this regard. We have always said that we are prepared to consider any proposals, from anyone, to improve the text. If history teaches us anything, it is that a good multilateral treaty in any field must be the outcome of collective efforts. No one delegation can do this in isolation.

And now the most important point, regarding this ruse. Some diplomats, when they have to conceal their intentions, divert attention to completely different subjects. In this case, you all saw it with your own eyes. But why are they doing this? It is all very simple. Not long ago, the United States House of Representatives approved a bill on national defence expenditure for 2019. This document provides for funding for the following in particular: first, the creation of a space-based system to intercept ballistic missiles; and second, the deployment of a new constellation, by the end of 2022, to provide early warning of a missile attack. The deployment of the interception systems, which must contain weapons, is scheduled for completion in 2030, and the testing of prototypes is scheduled to begin in four years, or in 2022. Note that this is not some vague idea; it is a law. This is the highest level of State document. I think that any comments on the matter would be superfluous. Thank you for your patience and attention.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you for your statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China, Mr. Fu Cong.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*speak in Chinese*): Thank you Mr. President. First, I would like to welcome the Ambassadors of Myanmar and Germany, who have just taken up their posts here. I look forward to working closely with them. Regarding the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, I would like to express a few points. First, this draft Treaty has received the support of the overwhelming majority of the States of the world. Secondly, China hopes that the Conference will be able to hold substantive discussions on the draft Treaty and, when the time is right, hold the relevant negotiations as soon as possible. China also welcomes constructive comments and proposals on this from any party. We believe that positive political will is all that is required in order to resolve any concerns through negotiations. Thirdly, outer space is the common asset of all of humankind. China has always advocated the peaceful use of outer space and opposed the weaponization of outer space and an arms race there; in particular, it opposes transforming outer space into a battleground. We hope that lasting peace and tranquillity can be maintained in outer space through the joint efforts of all parties. Thank you.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you very much. The Ambassador of the United States, Mr. Wood, wishes to speak again. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Wood (United States): Thank you, Mr. President. Our Russian colleague here has what he said was a right of reply, which seemed to be another long-winded speech of the type that we normally find coming from the Russian Federation. So I would recommend that he take that list of greatest hits and put it on a piece of paper and regurgitate it once again for us here in this body. I will try not to take up much time but I have to respond to a number of the charges that were made.

First of all, I think my Assistant Secretary, on the subject of the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, was very, very clear in her indictment of this extremely flawed Treaty and the fact that it will never garner consensus in this body. Our Russian colleague says that the United States should put forward ideas if

it does not like the Treaty. We have done so on numerous occasions and we have tried to work with our Russian friends and with China on trying to see if there are ways to make further progress on transparency and confidence-building measures. This Treaty, as we have said many, many times and in many, many forums, will not garner consensus. It is not a Treaty that can be changed by just providing edits. It totally disregards the issue of terrestrial anti-satellite weapons. We have said this over and over again to our Russian colleagues and Chinese friends but they continue to insist on trying to push this down the throats of the international community. Well, again, I make the point that the Treaty will never garner consensus in this body and I want to make that clear once again today.

Another issue is violations of international law. The Russian representative accused the United States of various violations of international law and I believe he said he could sit here all day and continue to list a number of violations. The United States could do so quite well and the list is, I think, much longer on this side. Let me just be very clear, my President stated what our views were on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Plan of Action was not a treaty; it was a political agreement. I want to make that very clear. If we want to talk about violations of international law and treaties, then let us start with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. I don't think I need to go into more detail on that or the Treaty on Open Skies that Russia has been violating. My Russian colleague raised the issue of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Russia supports a Government that has used chemical weapons against its own people. Russia has been involved in carrying out a chemical weapons attack on another member State in this body. I don't think he wants to go there but, while on the subject of chemical weapons, the Russian Federation made the point that it had destroyed completely its entire stock of chemical weapons. I would remind everyone that the United States contributed close to \$1 billion in cash and in efforts in kind to help with that destruction of that stockpile. You are welcome, Russia. We are committed, and we have said this over and again in many forums, we are committed to destroying our chemical weapons stockpile in line with the timetable that we have outlined repeatedly.

On the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, I explained in a recent subsidiary body session why the United States withdrew from it in 2002. We have said over and over again that the growing proliferation of ballistic missiles required a different approach from the United States and I am glad my Russian colleague admitted that the United States acted in accordance with its treaty obligations. It would be nice to see Russia act in accordance with its treaty obligations. My Russian colleague mentioned accusations of election meddling: yes, you meddled in our elections. You know that, others know that. You have meddled in other elections. You need to stop; we will not permit that to continue. I believe you proposed or another party has proposed a joint group on, a joint group on cybersecurity; really?

On the question of ballistic missile defence, as I think it is important to reiterate, we have tried for years to have a dialogue with our Russian colleagues on that subject and we have said that our activities in no way threaten their strategic nuclear forces. We have tried to have a dialogue, we have offered to work with them on ballistic missile defences in the past. They have rejected those efforts, so I am not sure there is much that we can do with regard to working with Russia on that issue.

One last point that was raised by my Russian colleague is what he said about legislation adopted in the United States Congress. I think he meant the legislation concerning a ballistic missile intercept layer. I would advise him to read the legislation before accusing the United States of something. That legislation from the United States Congress is very clear that, subject to the availability of appropriations, the Director of the Missile Defence Agency shall develop a space-based ballistic missile intercept layer. Those appropriations fund the conduct of a review of the feasibility of space-based interceptors. They do not, I repeat, do not fund the development, testing or deployment of any such systems. So again, I would advise my Russian friends, instead of expending a lot of resources and time on meddling in others' elections, to simply read the legislation put forward by Congress. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I apologize for taking so much time.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you very much. The representative of the Russian Federation wishes to take the floor again. The floor is yours, Sir.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*speak in Russian*): Mr. President, I do not intend to draw out this pointless discussion indefinitely. I wish simply to stress one point of direct relevance to the work of the Conference. With regard to the draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, we and our Chinese colleagues invited our American partners not only to propose corrections to the draft, which our delegations jointly submitted to the Conference for consideration, but also to come forward with an alternative. If you do not like the draft, as is quite possible, or it does not suit you for some reason, propose an alternative or submit a draft of your own, if you truly have an interest in keeping space free from weapons of all kinds and preserving space assets. That is what we proposed. I see no point in replying to any of the rest.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you. The representative of the United States of America has the floor, although I think that perhaps this should be the last statement on this matter.

Mr. Wood (United States): Thank you, Mr. President. I will be very brief in my response. I think my Assistant Secretary, again, was very clear regarding how, at this point in time, space arms control is not verifiable. As concerns the issue about not liking the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and proposing an alternative, we have sat down and talked to Russia and China about other alternatives, as I have mentioned with regard to future work on transparency and confidence-building measures. In fact, again, my Russian colleague keeps coming back to the fact that the United States needs to put something forward. Listen to us, read our statements, read my Assistant Secretary's statement. We have more than addressed the issue that you have raised here this morning. Thank you.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): The representative of the Russian Federation has the floor.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*speak in Russian*): I apologize to all those present and to you, Mr. President, but I wanted to provide a minor detail and bring a final note of clarity to our conversation. For many years, there has been no alternative to the Russian-Chinese draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space. No other documents were submitted to the Conference on Disarmament. This is what I meant when I said that our American colleagues had not proposed anything specific. I am sure you will agree that a statement is all well and good, but it is not a document, not a draft and not even food for thought.

The President (*speak in Arabic*): Thank you very much. Let us now move on. I do not know if any other delegation wishes to take the floor. It would appear not. Then, as I indicated at the start of this formal meeting, we will submit a draft decision to the members of the Conference to gauge opinions and solicit reactions and questions. This is, of course, part of the role of the President of the Conference who, in these circumstances, is responsible for preparing a programme of work for the Conference.

I will explain the draft decision to you in this formal setting, then later, if you agree, we will move to an informal setting to allow all delegations to express their views on the contents of the draft. I believe that the secretariat had distributed copies of the draft decision. You should have a copy in front of you now. Distinguished colleagues, this draft is based on the extensive bilateral consultations that I have conducted and takes account of the discussions held in the Conference today and at the previous meeting – which, I believe, fall within the mandate of the Conference – with the aim of progressing towards consensus on a programme of work. Right now, my responsibility as President of the Conference is to seek consensus to launch negotiations on disarmament issues that fall under the Conference's mandate.

During my presidency, it has not been possible to reach consensus on this issue. I believe that we need to engage in closer dialogue between members of the Conference in order to achieve that objective. I believe that the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, which he presented in Geneva on 24 May 2018, represents an opportunity to make the dialogue between members of the Conference more dynamic, with a view to reaching agreement on a programme of work.

Therefore, and in line with the rules of procedure, I suggest that we establish an informal working group within the Conference to discuss the issues raised in the Secretary-General's Agenda that fall within the remit of the Conference. Such a working group could begin its work once the Conference's subsidiary bodies have submitted their updated reports in line with decision CD/2119. The group would work in accordance with a programme agreed upon by the members of the Conference. It would identify ways to discuss the issues raised in the Secretary-General's Agenda and decide how long the discussions should last. The discussions would take place in the presence of disarmament experts and specialists, and the working group would be chaired by the President of the Conference, not in his or her personal capacity, but as President of the Conference.

I hope that the members of the Conference will support this proposal. It is a simple initiative, the aim of which, at the end of the day, is merely to try to generate new dynamism on the long and difficult path that I myself have trodden during my consultations to develop a programme of work for the Conference. I believe that, if the member States agree to this proposal, it will reflect the Conference's desire to explore all meaningful options for reaching agreement on a programme of work and its willingness to engage with initiatives developed by responsible, credible international actors both within and outside the Conference, such as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, that, I believe, offer new perspectives and approaches for making progress towards disarmament.

As I have already said, the secretariat of the Conference has distributed the text of the draft decision containing the proposal in question. If you will allow me, I will now adjourn the formal part of this meeting and we shall reconvene in an informal setting to allow the delegations to give their reactions to the proposal and to allow me to respond to any questions and requests for clarification.

We will therefore adjourn this meeting, and I will give you some time to consider the draft decision, then we will resume as an informal meeting. Do we all agree? It seems that we do. We will therefore reconvene informally in a few minutes. Thank you.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.