

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and seventy-first plenary meeting


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President: Ms. Beliz Celasin Rende(Turkey)

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The President: I call to order the 1471st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Distinguished colleagues, before we proceed, I would like to remind you that after the formal plenary, we will have an informal plenary meeting to continue the work on the annual report. The secretariat has already issued a first amendment to our draft report in document CD/WP.610/Amend.1, which has been distributed in hard copy in delegations' mailboxes on the first floor. An electronic copy was also circulated yesterday afternoon. The secretariat has also circulated a proposal for revised language for paragraphs 5 and 6, which have been reformulated in light of the written comments and the oral remarks made at the informal meetings. The proposal was sent by email to all delegations on Friday, 7 September. I would like to thank delegations for their very valuable feedback, constructive comments and suggestions.

Before we proceed with our order of business for today, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to our new colleague, His Excellency Mr. Yann Hwang, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament.

(spoke in French)

Ambassador, we are pleased to have you here with us. On behalf of the Conference and my country's delegation, I wish you a warm welcome. You may be assured of our full support in your new post.

(spoke in English)

Let me now turn to the list of speakers. I have France on my list. I give the floor to the representative of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) *(spoke in French)*: Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, dear colleagues, it is a great honour to speak before you today. This prestigious Council Chamber has borne witness to some of the great achievements of our predecessors, and it is in full cognizance of this fact that I take the floor. I would like to begin by recalling a few well-known facts. France is party to all disarmament and arms control instruments currently in force. It is fully engaged in all ongoing processes to regulate and control arms in both regional and international arenas. Its commitment to international law is unwavering. Thus, it has consistently striven to strengthen international law whenever the need has arisen to collectively regulate the conduct of States in this area, as part of a constant drive to build international peace and security.

As France believes so strongly in multilateralism, it will continue to cooperate and make every effort to ensure that these processes result in the agreements needed for our common security. Despite the difficulties we have encountered and the obstacles in our path, not to mention the decline of the standard that underpins our security architecture, our faith in multilateralism remains unshakable. It is thanks to multilateralism that the international community has managed to create a safer world, as a benefit for all. That the law should be eroded and weakened is not a fate we can accept. Specifically, we will continue to stand resolutely against nuclear and chemical proliferation using whatever means may prove necessary. The multilateralism that I speak of is based on the use of tried-and-tested tools, by experienced and skilled diplomats. The Conference on Disarmament is one such tool, and I very much appreciate the honour of representing my country in a forum so renowned for its professionalism.

The Conference may be hamstrung, but everybody knows that this is not its own doing. Of course, my country subscribes wholeheartedly to the view that general and complete disarmament can occur only in the right security conditions, as part of an effort to ensure the stability of our environment and respect for international law. Nevertheless, certain historical and political difficulties can and must be overcome, since disarmament and arms control law, in addition to contributing to strategic stability, should be considered as a first step towards building trust and transparency and easing tensions.

In this regard, I note the positive discussions held within the subsidiary bodies in accordance with the decision contained in document CD/2119. Such substantive discussions can give rise to tangible progress and are the fruit of collective efforts worthy of recognition. It is for this reason that we cannot in any event lose faith in the Conference – the only multilateral forum for negotiating global disarmament treaties. It has many

strengths, such as its representation of States with key capabilities, and this ensures that any commitments made are sustainable. The consensus rule, while challenging, is the best way to ensure the universality and effective implementation of treaties. This is what guides the work of my country, which last June chaired the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. It is also in this vein that France has put forward a number of concrete proposals, including the draft Treaty Banning the Production of Fissile Material for Nuclear Weapons or Other Nuclear Explosive Devices, to cite another example.

Some disarmament processes are conceived as if they can be imposed on States from without. They are based on conjecture and a deliberate disregard of the facts. We remain convinced that procedures like these, which are built upon an unrealistic strategy, are deeply counterproductive insofar as they disregard the need to avoid undermining the security of each of us, and thus, of all of us. Above all, they contribute to the serious weakening, indeed, the erosion, of fundamental standards that have helped to ensure our collective security. Disarmament cannot be decreed; it must be built step by step, progressively and realistically, with the objective of stability. It is in this pragmatic spirit of good will that I wish to assure you of my country's sincere commitment to cooperate actively with all the governments of the international community, and also, of course, with civil society.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I assure you, Madam President, Secretary-General and dear colleagues, of my personal commitment to do everything I can with my delegation to work towards consolidating and enriching this normative structure of disarmament. We must take steps to protect our future. I am aware of the difficulty of this task in such an increasingly complex and unpredictable strategic environment, but rest assured that my country's actions, which I intend to relay in this forum, are driven by the will for international peace, stability and security. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chigiji (Zimbabwe): Madam President, I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of the Group of 21. The Group of 21 is taking the floor for the first time during your presidency. On behalf of the Group, therefore, let me congratulate you on your assumption of this high office. As we approach the end of the third part of the Conference on Disarmament for 2018, we pledge our cooperation and we hope that your presidency will be crowned with success, given that you have already demonstrated exceptional diplomatic skill, efficiency and commitment in your stewardship of the affairs of the Conference. The Group of 21 stands ready to render all possible support to ensure the success of your mandate, especially as regards the finalization and submission to the General Assembly of our annual report, including the reports of the subsidiary bodies, in accordance with the decision contained in document CD/2119.

The Group of 21 would like to restate some principles and rules which should guide the work of the Conference in the exercise we are currently engaged in. The Group would like to stress the fundamental principle of upholding the rules of procedure and the office of the President. This principle is reflected in rule 3, and I quote: "All member States of the Conference shall take part in its work in conditions of full equality as independent States, in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations."

This principle is implied also in rule 9, and again I quote: "When the Conference is in session, the Presidency of the Conference shall rotate among all its members; each President shall preside for a four-working-week period. The rotation which began in January 1979, based on the English alphabetical list of membership, shall be followed."

With regard to how we reflect the views of members in the reports, rule 45 is clear; it states: "The reports of the Conference shall be factual and reflect the negotiations and work of the Conference."

Distinguished colleagues, we believe the best way to uphold the institution of the Conference on Disarmament is by respecting the rules of procedure and the office of the President. In this regard, rule 9 of the rules of procedure should not be questioned.

The President: I thank the representative of Zimbabwe for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Ms. Kuznetsova (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, the Russian delegation would like to congratulate the participants in the Conference on the generally successful adoption of the final reports of the Conference's subsidiary bodies. We are grateful to all those who helped to achieve a mutually acceptable result that has been welcomed by all delegations – to our colleagues, the staff of the Conference's secretariat, the translators and interpreters and, of course, the Turkish delegation, which presided over our Conference's work. We have together shown that the Conference on Disarmament is able to work and take decisions on the basis of consensus.

Now we have before us other, no less important tasks. I am thinking first and foremost of our agreement on the main document for the 2018 session: the report of the Conference on Disarmament to the United Nations General Assembly. However, instead of setting to work, certain delegations are making persistent attempts to drag the Conference into politicized polemics. At the last meeting, the representative of the United Kingdom informed delegations about the status of investigation into the incidents in Salisbury and Amesbury. We noted that the tone of the intervention at the Conference was softer than that of the statement made on 5 September by Prime Minister Theresa May, which nonetheless does nothing to change its general anti-Russian bent. Understandably, we cannot leave such a hostile rebuke unanswered.

First and foremost, it is particularly interesting that the statements of the British officials were made after the publication, at the behest of London, of a report by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the conclusions drawn by its specialists about the Amesbury incident. The report specifically states that the results of the analysis of environmental and biomedical samples taken by OPCW experts confirm the British findings about the nature of the toxic chemical that poisoned the two British victims in Amesbury. In chemical terms, it was a nerve agent, and the same that was discovered in samples from the poisoning of the Skripals, in Salisbury. Significantly, there is not a word in the report about the provenance of this nerve agent; it does not even mention the word "Novichok", which for their part, the British authorities have circulated. But for the British, that is of no importance. The main thing is to tie OPCW in with the conclusions drawn by the military laboratory at Porton Down, and by so doing, to the unfounded accusations of Russian involvement in the incidents.

We would like once again to reiterate that neither OPCW nor the Porton Down laboratory were able to establish the country of origin of the poisons used in Salisbury and Amesbury. Work on this kind of chemical compound was carried out in, apart from Britain, a large number of other Western countries, as we see from numerous sources of information, including from open sources.

We have based our position on the facts and we will continue to do so. We have on numerous occasions pointed out that the Chemical Weapons Convention contains nothing that would prohibit the Technical Secretariat's cooperation with a State party in confirming the results of a national investigation. Strictly speaking, assistance is given to those States parties that require it in order to fulfil their obligations under the Convention, first and foremost in relation with the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles. As a rule, that means those countries that lack the appropriate equipment or specialists. The British have both in ample supply. The Porton Down laboratory that I just mentioned is specifically the place where work has been carried out, and continues to be carried out, with the substance known as "Novichok" in the West.

In this case, if one State party raises questions to another, consultation procedures are engaged. They can be carried out either directly through bilateral means or with the cooperation of the OPCW Technical Secretariat or its Executive Council. We have on numerous occasions made proposals in that vein. They have either been rejected or completely ignored by the British authorities.

Apart from that, on 16 March 2018, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation initiated a criminal case for the attempt at premeditated murder of Russian citizens committed in Salisbury, in the United Kingdom, under article 105 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. In this connection, in accordance with the bilateral consular convention of 2 December 1965 and the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters of 20 April 1959, requests for cooperation in the investigation were sent to the British authorities. There has been no answer to date.

It was not Russia, but the United Kingdom that has declined to enter into contact in every conceivable way, both bilaterally and in the OPCW framework. Furthermore, why has the British Government so far refused to submit information to OPCW, as required under article IX of the Convention in the event of doubts about compliance with the Convention's provisions, i.e., thus hiding from OPCW and the international community suspicions or suppositions about a possible failure to comply with the Convention? Instead of calling the British to task on this point, their Western partners continue to insist that we cooperate with London and respond to the questions they have posed. We have received no requests from the British authorities.

To cite some proof, I would quote an article by Boris Johnson in the *Washington Post*. For the sake of clarity I will read it in English:

(spoke in English)

“Today, only Russia has stockpiles of Novichok agents. On Monday, 12 March, I summoned the Russian Ambassador and gave his Government 36 hours to inform us if any of these stocks had somehow gone missing.”

(spoke in Russian)

Is this how questions are posed in a civilized society? This is an ultimatum, and certainly not a diplomatic one.

To fill in the picture, I would also quote a hypothesis put forward in speeches by Prime Minister Theresa May and Ambassador Liddle, again in the original:

(spoke in English)

“Based on a body of intelligence, the Government has concluded that the two individuals named by the police and CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] are officers from the Russian military intelligence service also known as the GRU. The GRU is a highly disciplined organization with a well-established chain of command.”

(spoke in Russian)

It is indeed strange to hear such ill-informed assessments coming from the all-knowing British special services. For those who do not know, I can inform you that the Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU, has not been in existence for a number of years now. If British intelligence let such an obvious fact slip by, then that clearly calls into question the quality of all the rest of their conclusions and the declarations they have made based on them.

In concluding, I would like to point out that information from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is available on the documentation table. It sets out our position on the “Skripal Affair” and research involving “Novichok”. We are also sending it to delegations by electronic mail.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for her statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Many thanks, Madam President. I do not propose to take up an awful lot of time in a prolonged exchange on this matter, but I would just note before the Conference that it is rather typical that, rather than engaging with the facts and evidence that has been laid out for all to see, the Russian Federation prefers to play a legalistic and linguistic game designed to deflect attention from its reckless and blatant actions.

I would simply recall what I said at our last meeting. Others will attempt to discredit and undermine the facts through speculation and innuendo, whereas British justice deals in facts and evidence, which we have laid out plainly for all to see. I also note that the Russian delegation failed to express its condolences for the death of an innocent woman or the lasting damage done to the lives of the others affected.

In the statement which the Russian delegation has shared with us this morning on paper and, I think, also by email, the delegation suggests that the United Kingdom does not care about the Chemical Weapons Convention. Madam President, it is precisely because we do care about the Chemical Weapons Convention that we are determined to challenge the use of chemical weapons everywhere, whether in Salisbury or in Syria. It is because we care about the Chemical Weapons Convention that we, in company with an overwhelming majority of States parties at the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, held in the Hague in June, agreed to strengthen the Convention and end impunity for chemical weapons use. We are determined to do that, as I say, whether such weapons are used in Syria or in Salisbury.

The President: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Bordiian (Ukraine): Thank you, Madam President. I would like to read out a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the use of chemical weapons in Great Britain.

“Ukraine expresses its full solidarity with Great Britain regarding its conclusions about Russia’s use of chemical weapons in Salisbury and Amesbury.

The conclusions of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons that the toxic chemicals used in the Amesbury and Salisbury attacks are of the same nature is another confirmation of the Russian Federation’s continued aggressive policy aimed against the State’s sovereignty and undermining international law and order.

Ukraine reiterates its firm stance that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances is a flagrant violation of international law and those responsible for such actions must be held accountable.

We are convinced that only international solidarity can be an effective response to the constant provocations of the Russian Federation, and we encourage our foreign partners to continue coordinated pressure on the Kremlin to make it refrain from its aggressive actions.”

The President: I thank the representative of Ukraine for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President. The United States stands in solidarity with the United Kingdom in its efforts to bring to justice two Russian intelligence officers for the brazen use of the Russian military-grade nerve agent Novichok in the attempted assassination of Sergei and Yulia Skripal on 4 March 2018.

The evidence presented on 6 September is further proof of the responsibility of the Russian Federation for this insidious attack, which endangered thousands of citizens and ultimately claimed the life of Dawn Sturgess, and we commend the work of the United Kingdom services in identifying the Russian agents involved.

While Russia has eliminated its declared chemical weapons stockpile, the use of this chemical weapon in Salisbury substantiates the conclusion by the United States that Russia has not met its obligation under the Chemical Weapons Convention, by failing to destroy all of its chemical weapons. Its reckless contempt for international norms against chemical weapons use must stop. The United States calls on Russia to join the civilized nations of the world by giving up its chemical weapons programme.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States for his statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Madam President. At the outset, on behalf of France, I would like to echo the words of solidarity expressed by our highest authorities to our friends in the United Kingdom, who have twice this year been subjected to the use of a nerve agent, in Salisbury and Amesbury. The investigations of the British police have come to an end, and my delegation would like to commend the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for its transparency and its handling of this case, in close cooperation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), whose work has been exemplary.

The evidence is clear. The findings of the United Kingdom and the OPCW Technical Secretariat confirm the initial view, which we share. The only plausible explanation is that the Russian Federation is responsible. We note the conclusion of the United Kingdom that such an operation could only have been approved and launched at a sufficiently high level of the Russian Government. We also take note of the arrest warrants issued by the courts of the United Kingdom for the two Russian military intelligence officers identified by the British police, and we stand ready to cooperate with them. In light of this very serious evidence, I would like to express my country's deep concern and reiterate our condemnation of such acts, which are unacceptable. I have taken note of the statement made by our Russian colleague today. However, we would like to stress that we expect the Russian Federation to fully commit to protecting the Chemical Weapons Convention and to reaffirm the prohibition on the use of such weapons, as we will need to strengthen the capacity of OPCW if it is to fulfil its mandate.

An important decision was adopted at the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in June this year, in the wake of the use of chemical weapons. That decision should serve as our road map. Indeed, it is crucial in this context to provide the international community with a mechanism for the investigation and attribution of all cases where chemical weapons of any kind are used. Such a mechanism is essential for the protection of the chemical regime, and we have long encouraged the Russian Federation to make a commitment to this end. The President of the French Republic, Mr. Macron, recently reiterated that France remains fully resolute in its drive and determination to protect the Chemical Weapons Convention regime.

Lastly, I would like to remind those present that, on 23 January 2018, France and 37 other countries launched the ministerial-level partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, that a further ministerial-level meeting was held on 18 May this year and that an expert meeting will be held on this important topic before the end of the year. This partnership brings together countries from all continents and all regional groups, and we encourage all countries, including the members of the Conference on Disarmament, to join it. Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic issued a statement on 7 September concerning the British campaign against the Russian Federation in connection with the so-called Skripal case. In the statement, it expressed its full solidarity with the position of the Russian Federation, which categorically rejected the British allegations and expressed its willingness to engage in consultations with the British authorities based on the agreements concerning criminal cases signed between the two parties. The issue was raised during a meeting of the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on 18 April 2018. It was demonstrated quite clearly during the meeting that a number of technical aspects needed to be clarified and discussed in the relevant technical body, namely the organization itself. We note with concern, however, that some member States continue to raise the issue of the use of chemical weapons in our deliberations at the Conference on Disarmament. We are particularly concerned about persistent allegations that are not based on concrete evidence but on unconvincing speculation that would prove unsustainable in any legal discussion.

Our question is as follows: How long will the process of building positions and pressing charges on such serious issues continue to be based on likely odds, rather than on

conclusive evidence? The continued refusal of Britain to engage in a dialogue with the Russian Federation, and its continuous pressing of false charges, are not indicative of any attempt to establish the truth. Britain and some other countries are adopting a politicized approach to the incident in question, based on unfounded accusations and a steadfast rejection of all forms of cooperation with a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention that would be in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention. In line with this politicized and hostile approach, some States have resorted to a series of unjustified diplomatic actions that are contrary to diplomatic customs and traditions. Syria has in recent years suffered, and continues to suffer, from this approach. We believe that the time has come to address these grave and sensitive issues with the seriousness that they deserve and to refrain from using such allegations as an excuse for pressing charges, engaging in misleading politicization and launching attacks on sovereign States, in violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Madam President, China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by any State, organization or person, under any circumstances and for whatever purpose. We call for thorough, objective and impartial investigations of allegations of their use, based on hard evidence, to arrive at conclusions that will be borne out by history and can stand up to the facts. That has clearly always been our position.

We have paid close attention to the incident that took place this March in Salisbury, England and to subsequent developments. We believe that the questions at hand should be dealt with in accordance with the rules and procedures of the Chemical Weapons Convention, in the framework of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We listened attentively to the briefing presented by the representative of the United Kingdom at the last plenary meeting. At the same time, we note that, so far, it has been impossible for those involved in the incident to arrive at a conclusion that can be accepted by all establishing those responsible. Given the current situation, the parties must, based on the principles of mutual respect and consultation on an equal basis, address this issue through dialogue. At a time when the international community must face multiple challenges, all parties must cooperate and refrain from confrontation, focus on the merits of the case and avoid any actions that would politicize the question or exacerbate frictions. Members of the Conference especially must show unity so that the Conference's work can take place in a constructive and conducive atmosphere. Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Thank you, Madam President. I would like to quote from a press release by our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, issued on 6 September:

“The Australian Government strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances ...

The results of the UK police investigation confirm Russia's culpability for the heinous attack against Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury on 4 March, in clear and direct violation of international law.

Australia shares the UK's anger and outrage at this dangerous and deliberate act by Russia, which also puts at risk the British public, police and other first responders.

We are in lockstep with the UK on the importance of holding Russia to account and reaffirm our support for calls on Russia to fully disclose the extent of its chemical weapons programme.

The Australian Government is in close consultation with the UK Government and other partners. We are committed to acting with our allies and partners to deter further Russian violations of international security.”

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for her statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Davison (Canada): Thank you, Madam President, I would just like to note that on 6 September the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, the United States of America and the United Kingdom released a statement regarding the Salisbury attack, and I want to cite a few things from that. We reiterate our outrage at the chemical weapon use in the Salisbury attack; we urge Russia to provide full disclosure of its Novichok programme; and, finally, we express our full confidence in the analysis by the United Kingdom of the events surrounding the attack, including its assessment that the two suspects were from the Russian military intelligence service.

The President: I thank you for your statement and I now give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President. I am taking the floor to respond to the charges that were made by the representative of Syria. We have heard once again the Syrian representative continue to refute the very clear, indisputable evidence that has been put forward about his country's use and deployment of chemical weapons against its own people. Its use of chemical weapons, as I have said before and continue to say, is not in question. The Syrian representative can continue to say that discussion of chemical weapons in this body is inappropriate, but again I will remind everyone that the Chemical Weapons Convention was negotiated in this body and that the fact that a State party to the Convention has engaged in the use of chemical weapons is something for this body to be concerned about, and we will continue to raise this issue, as appropriate.

The President: I thank you for your statement and I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Madam President. First, I would like to congratulate our new colleague, the representative of France. We wish him well and we look forward to working with him and his team as we did with his predecessor.

With respect to the investigation into the chemical weapons attack that took place in Salisbury and the subsequent poisoning in Amesbury last month, on 6 September my colleague in the Security Council made the following remarks:

“The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the use of chemical weapons anytime, anywhere and under any circumstance. Let me reiterate our full support for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its important work. As the United Kingdom is faced with the reckless use of chemical weapons on its soil, the Netherlands stands in firm solidarity with our neighbour, ally and friend.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands expresses its shock about the reckless attack with the military-grade nerve agent on British soil, exposing innocent civilians to great risk. Since then, we have learned that the attack resulted in even more victims, one of whom, Miss Dawn Sturgess, did not survive. We express our sincere condolences to her loved ones. The issuing of criminal charges is an important step that brings us closer to establishing the full truth so that justice can be served. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has full confidence in the investigation carried out by the British authorities and in the fairness and impartiality of the British justice system.

Now that the perpetrators of this horrendous act have been identified, they must also be brought to justice. Therefore, we call on all States to cooperate to ensure that the two suspects have their day in court in the United Kingdom and to bring the full truth to light about how this attack was carried out. Those who bear responsibility must be held accountable.”

The President: I thank the representative of the Netherlands for his statement and I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Madam President. I wish to take the floor in response to the statement made by my colleague from the United States. I reiterate my rejection of the accusations, which are unilateral charges propagated by the United States and its allies, without any solid evidence. The material that the representative of the United States perceives as irrefutable evidence failed to secure a

consensus when it was discussed in the relevant bodies, namely the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Security Council, since it was based on investigations that were undermined by many shortcomings and failed to meet the requirements of the Chemical Weapons Convention, negotiated at this Conference.

This Conference has indeed engaged in negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention. However, the Conference on Disarmament has not been assigned any role when it comes to monitoring its implementation. This task has been assigned to a specialized body, OPCW, and the Security Council has been assigned the task of addressing any violations. I therefore reiterate our position that the persistent focus on the issue of the use of chemical weapons is politically motivated. If the Conference wishes to discuss the issue, it would be preferable to accept the Russian initiative concerning negotiations on a convention aimed at suppressing the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups. It should be noted in this context that the United States, which has consistently pressed charges against the Syrian Government, has never referred to the use of chemical weapons by armed terrorist groups in Syria and elsewhere. It is this shortcoming that calls for more serious consideration, instead of continuing politicized accusations.

The President: Thank you. I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Madam President. Let me first of all thank my distinguished French colleague, Ambassador Yann Hwang, for his introductory remarks and welcome him to the Conference on Disarmament and pledge our close cooperation with him and with the French delegation here in the Conference.

I had originally not planned to make a statement, but I now feel compelled to add my voice to those who have spoken out clearly on the use of a military-grade chemical weapons agent in the United Kingdom. First of all, I would like to express my and my delegation's condolences yet again to the civilian victims in the United Kingdom.

I would like to recall the statement of the Heads of Government of Germany and four other countries on 6 September, which has already been referred to by my Canadian colleague, and would just like to underline that we too urge Russia to fully disclose its Novichok programme.

We have full confidence in the investigations by the United Kingdom and in their assessment that the two suspects were officers from the Russian military intelligence service and that this operation was almost certainly approved at a senior government level.

We also believe that it is paramount that the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention be upheld and we have full confidence in the analysis provided by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

We call upon the Russian Federation to engage in a substantive exchange on the use of that military-grade chemical agent instead of making procedural arguments in order to deflect from the real issue – the death of innocent civilians and the credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The President: I thank the representative of Germany for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Ms. Kuznetsova (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is truly a pity that a number of capitals have again, under the guise of transatlantic solidarity, willingly closed their eyes to the lack of any evidence of what actually took place with the poisoning in Great Britain. This sheer mockery of common sense is thus continuing.

Russia has on numerous occasions and at various levels stated that it had nothing to do with what occurred in Salisbury and Amesbury. We have offered many times to join efforts with the British to investigate these incidents. The negative reaction to our calls for cooperation and the refusal for half a year now to allow access to Sergei and Yulia Skripal, who are Russian citizens, and who were declared to be victims of the attack, only serve to strengthen our conviction that London has found nothing to support its claims. All the accusations against us are complete fabrications.

We regret to note that some of the public figures in the West, falling captive to their own geopolitical ambitions, are persisting in their attempts to portray Russia as an enemy, stoking anti-Russian feelings in their countries. In reality what is needed is just the opposite: we need to join forces to combat real and shared threats affecting us all, and first and foremost, international terrorism.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for her statement. I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Donnelly (New Zealand): Thank you, Madam President. I wish to refer briefly to statements recently made by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Right Honourable Jacinda Ardern, and the Foreign Minister, the Right Honourable Winston Peters.

In these statements, New Zealand underscores its belief that the investigation by the United Kingdom has been robust and thorough and states that we have every confidence in its conclusion. It confirms that the two suspects were officers from Russian military intelligence. Given the clear chain of evidence produced by the United Kingdom, the New Zealand Government supports the United Kingdom and the international community in bringing this matter to court.

New Zealand condemns any use of chemical weapons, whether it is in Syria or on the streets of the United Kingdom. New Zealand believes all States must adhere to obligations under international law, including in respect of chemical weapons.

The President: I thank the representative of New Zealand for her statement. I see that the representative of the United States is requesting the floor. You have the floor, sir.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President. I apologize for taking the floor again. I just wanted to just say that today marks the seventeenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, and my country is mourning the loss of its citizens and the loss of citizens from a number of other countries, who lost their lives in these attacks. To those countries, I would say, your losses are our losses. We will not forget them. The United States will continue to fight terrorism in all its forms and wherever it takes place.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador. As mentioned earlier, we will meet for an informal meeting after the conclusion of this formal meeting. This concludes our business for this morning. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.