

Conference on Disarmament

English

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


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 29 January 2019, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Yurii Klymenko..... (Ukraine)

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The President: I call to order the 1476th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, before we proceed with our order of business for today, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the new colleagues who have assumed their responsibilities as representatives of their Governments.

Your Excellency Mr. Emilio Izquierdo Miño, Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations Office at Geneva, on behalf of my own Government and on behalf of the Conference, I would like to take this opportunity to assure you of our full cooperation and support in your new assignments.

We have a number of speakers from the previous meeting who would like to take the floor. We also have two requests for the right of reply. However, before we open the floor, I would like to propose that we consider the new requests of non-member States to participate in the work of the Conference at the 2019 session.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, the requests received by the Conference secretariat up to yesterday, Monday, 28 January 2019, at 3 p.m. are contained in document CD/WP.617/Add.1, which is available on your tables. Any requests from non-member States received after the date indicated above will be presented for your consideration and decision at the next plenary meeting.

May I take it that the Conference decides to invite these States to participate in our work in accordance with its rules of procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: Now, allow me to suspend the meeting for a brief moment to allow the representatives of the non-member States who have just been invited to participate in the work of the Conference to take their seats in the Council Chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would now like to turn to the list of speakers for today. I have seen the delegation of China with a raised flag, so I would like to ask whether the delegation of China would like to deliver a statement or raise a point of order. If it is a point of order, the floor is given to the representative of China.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): Thank you, Mr. President and dear colleagues. I note with concern that we are starting the meeting at about 10.13 a.m. Almost three or four statements could have been made during that time, and such a waste of time is not good. We hope that more discipline is injected into our work, so please come early, come on time and have our meetings start at 10 a.m. sharp. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his comments and suggestions. They are well noted by the presidency. We also count on the support of all other delegations in our endeavours to begin our work on time.

I would now like to turn to the list of speakers for today. The first delegation in our list is the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, followed by Ecuador.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to congratulate Ambassador Yuriy Klymenko of Ukraine on assuming the presidency of this forum. We would also like to express our support for your work and all your endeavours in the coming weeks and to assure you of our cooperation. We are pleased to be working with you as one of the Conference's six Presidents for this year and we hope that this session of the Conference will prove fruitful and substantive.

We welcome Ms. Anja Kaspersen, Director of the Geneva branch of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and express our appreciation for her excellent work. We also welcome the new Secretary of the Conference of Disarmament, Ms. Radha Day, and wish her every success. We extend our greetings to the distinguished Ambassadors, the delegations of the member States of the Conference on Disarmament and, in particular, those who will hold the presidency together with Venezuela in the course of this year. We warmly welcome the distinguished Ambassadors of China, Mr. Li Song, and India, Mr. Pankaj Sharma.

Mr. President, my country attaches great importance to the work of the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating body and regards it as an integral and vital part of the disarmament machinery, which must be preserved and strengthened. We stress the need to overcome the deadlock in the Conference and reach a consensus on the programme of work. Venezuela supports any effort to break this deadlock and strengthen the Conference in the interests of disarmament and non-proliferation. Our country deems it necessary to adopt a broad, balanced and comprehensive programme of work for 2019, with a negotiating mandate that takes stock of disarmament-related priorities.

We will consider the proposals put forward by the Presidents of the Conference and the member States. We reiterate our interest in working in a spirit of constructive cooperation with all member States of the Conference to advance the substantive work of this forum through transparent and interactive dialogue.

Mr. President, Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to the existing institutions and agreements relating to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Real progress needs to be made in the negotiations and discussions in these areas. We, alongside the Group of 21 and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, give the utmost priority to achieving nuclear disarmament. We reiterate our concern over the threat posed to humanity by the existence of nuclear weapons and their possible use or threat of use. Venezuela believes that outer space must be protected from any attempt at militarization and must be used only for peaceful purposes in accordance with international law, for the benefit of all peoples.

Mr. President, we are convinced that multilateralism is the best tool for promoting the Conference's work and that norms and agreements adopted multilaterally in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations are the only truly effective and sustainable means of approaching matters relating to disarmament and international security. The Conference can play a vital role in this regard. We should not keep postponing the start of our substantive work. The validity and even the relevance of this forum will depend on the urgency with which we embark on this task. Our country reaffirms its willingness to negotiate any agenda item agreed by all States at the Conference on Disarmament.

Venezuela subscribes to the idea of the collective responsibility needed to promote international peace and security. Diplomacy of peace based on Bolivarian ideals advocates constructing a multipolar international system that is built around peace, justice, development and full respect for the rules and principles of international law. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Venezuela for his statement and for the kind words for the presidency and would now like to give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me first congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We have every confidence in your experience and diplomatic ability to take this delicate task forward. I would like to reiterate my assurances that you have the full commitment and support of my delegation to that end. I am grateful for your gracious welcome as I take up my position as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ecuador, and for having kindly received me in your office this morning.

Mr. President, Ecuador attaches great and profound importance to the work of the Conference on Disarmament as an institution for substantive multilateral disarmament negotiation. My delegation therefore hopes that, by working in a genuine spirit of cooperation, we will be able, after more than two decades, to agree on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that would allow this forum to fulfil its core mandate of negotiating fundamental and necessary international disarmament instruments and to achieve the highest objectives set by the international community. Such is our shared responsibility.

In terms of the work for this year, the discussions that took place last year within the framework of the subsidiary bodies were, in our opinion, very positive. In this vein, we see merit in continuing those dialogues with the aim of reaching common understandings, some of which are already contained in the reports that were approved, particularly that of subsidiary body 3 on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Mr. President, Ecuador has a long-standing commitment to disarmament and multilateralism. We are party to the vast majority of international disarmament instruments and we belong to the region that created the first nuclear-weapon-free zone through the Treaty of Tlatelolco. A distinguished Ecuadorian diplomat, who went on to become President of the United Nations General Assembly, was one of the select group of jurists who drafted the Treaty. I believe it is also worth mentioning the decisive role of Ecuador in the substantive meeting of the Disarmament Commission in 1999, when it presided over the successful negotiation of the guidelines on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. We also negotiated and signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017.

In the spirit of its firm commitment to disarmament, Ecuador believes it is necessary to strengthen the work of this Conference in order to build mutual trust and, in particular, to foster the political will, especially among nuclear-weapon States, to achieve specific objectives that would allow significant progress to be made pursuant to article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Ecuador, like most States, considers nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to be necessarily parallel and interrelated processes. For this reason, it is hoped that the actions of nuclear-weapon States will be consistent with the commitments that were made in this regard with the firm intention of building and consolidating peace between nations, thereby ensuring the well-being of current and future generations.

Mr. President, in line with this view, Ecuador reaffirms its ongoing support for intensifying efforts towards general disarmament and, as a priority, efforts aimed at the prohibition and elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, Ecuador expresses its support for proposals to begin legally binding multilateral negotiations aimed at banning the production of fissile material, preventing an arms race in outer space and implementing negative security assurances.

Mr. President, the Secretary-General stated in his Agenda for Disarmament unveiled last year that: "There are moments in history when individual and collective courage and conscience come together to change the course of events." With that in mind, our hope is that this forum does not lack the conscience or the courage to take the decisions that the planet needs and that the international community is urgently calling for. You can count on the unwavering commitment of Ecuador in that endeavour. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the representative of Ecuador for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Chile, followed by Iran.

Mr. Eguiguren (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to wish you every success in your endeavours. You can rest assured of my country's ongoing constructive participation in the Conference's discussions. I also welcome the distinguished Ambassadors of China, India and Ecuador.

Mr. President, Chile, as a Member State of the United Nations, embraced nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament early on as one of the key elements of collective security, as it did the obligations relating to international cooperation required for their enforcement. We have thus joined in general efforts to prevent proliferation and eliminate not only weapons of mass destruction, but also conventional weapons deemed incompatible with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Chile has maintained its steadfast commitment to multilateralism, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, non-proliferation and general and complete disarmament. This unwavering persistence is due to our belief that, as a member of the international community, we have an ethical and humanitarian duty to assume collective responsibility for peace and security.

Chile welcomes the unveiling of the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament which, in addition to reaffirming the place of disarmament and non-proliferation at the centre of the work of the United Nations, has given us a full overview of the current threats, while at the same time urging us to find new ways of cooperating and working together. Chile supports this call. That is why, at the start of this first part of the Conference on Disarmament session, we are reiterating our political will to make progress towards the goals for which this forum was created and which it more than fulfilled for many years.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament, which was established as the multilateral forum for the discussion and negotiation of multilateral disarmament instruments, celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year. We should recall that the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, to name but the most important, were negotiated within the Conference, just as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was negotiated under its predecessor.

However, it is highly regrettable that, for the past 20 years, the Conference has not been in a position to do anything to consolidate international stability through the negotiation of multilateral instruments in accordance with its mandate. In fact, no consensus has been achieved on even the slightest undertaking. Last year, the inertia was overcome to some extent by the agreement to create five subsidiary bodies to review and discuss historical items on the Conference agenda. Sadly, those efforts were not reflected in the Conference's final report and we had to content ourselves with a procedural report, which certainly did not do justice to the work carried out in the course of the year.

Last year's experience, Mr. President, left a bitter taste of defeat for my delegation. We therefore wish to emphasize some points. Firstly, it is inconceivable that we once again have to insist on the need to agree on a programme of work, since it should be an obvious step in the Conference on Disarmament. We understand that the programme of work is a methodological tool for structuring our work. We should avoid placing on it the historic burden that we know and be pragmatic in its negotiation.

As we mentioned last year, my delegation welcomed the adoption of the decision contained in document CD/2119, which created the subsidiary bodies, as a step in the right direction towards the adoption of a programme of work. This year we want to build on the progress that was made. Reissuing the subsidiary bodies' agenda from last year does not meet my delegation's expectations.

Secondly, the differences of opinion that arose last year with respect to certain rules of procedure lead us to conclude that the Conference's working methods need to be updated. We must lean towards a uniform interpretation of their value, order of importance and relevance to the case at hand, so as to avoid them being applied selectively for purposes that fall outside the scope of this Conference. Linked to this is the much-needed and overdue conversation regarding the interpretation of the consensus rule. While it was originally conceived to protect the interests of member States, we have seen it being misused as a sort of silent veto.

Thirdly, the Conference on Disarmament needs to be reconnected to the reality that exists outside of this chamber to bring it closer to the concerns of our countries' societies, for the sake of transparency and the pressing need to restore its legitimacy. Accordingly, we support the involvement of civil society in the Conference's work. We are well into the twenty-first century now and we cannot continue to allow secrecy to be the norm in our work.

Fourthly, my delegation considers that we must insist on raising awareness of the gender issue in the work of the Conference. In particular, this forum must pay greater attention to bringing a gender perspective and approach to weapons of mass destruction.

To sum up, Mr. President, we would like to see the work of this Conference – which should serve as a model forum for disarmament – start up once again. In view of this, my delegation would like to call attention to, and express its gratitude for, the support of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. Its strategy guide in technically complex areas is invaluable. To conclude, Mr. President, we once again wish you every

success during your presidency and reiterate our country's willingness to contribute to the work of the Conference. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Chile for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Iran, followed by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Azarsa (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I will read a statement on behalf of our Ambassador:

Mr. President, let me congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you success in steering the Conference's deliberations during your tenure. We recognize the formidable task you have undertaken and assure you of our commitment to work constructively with you in fulfilling your responsibility, in particular in preparing a balanced and inclusive programme of work. That said, my delegation would like to share a few thoughts with you and the other distinguished delegations.

Firstly, we have said repeatedly that the Conference is the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community. In practice, however, this forum has been left helplessly paralysed for the past two decades as a consequence of the unwillingness of some actors to address nuclear disarmament. It is very unsettling, though, that this traditional lack of political will, as unfortunate as it has been, looks benign compared to what we are facing now, which is an authentic malignancy set on disabling the whole institution of the Conference either by trumping up artificial issues of a procedural nature or by using divisive and harmful rhetoric in the Conference.

Secondly, the overall political and security context we are living in at present makes nuclear disarmament more urgent than ever before. As the United Nations Secretary-General put it in a meeting of the Security Council a year ago, on 18 January 2018, global anxieties about nuclear weapons are higher than at any time since the cold war. That is not merely because of the tremendously indiscriminate and apocalyptic nature of these weapons, but perhaps more importantly – especially these days – because of the impulsive and reckless behaviour, coupled with the straightforward contempt for the rule of law, multilateralism and international institutions, that characterizes today's overlying political context.

Thirdly, we nonetheless stress the importance of a balanced and inclusive programme of work that properly addresses the core issues of genuine relevance and concern to the Conference – namely, nuclear disarmament, assurances of non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Rule 29 of the Conference's rules of procedure requires the President to draw up a programme of work for the Conference. Bearing in mind rule 28, which states that the Conference, at the beginning of its annual session, shall establish its programme of work, including a schedule of its activities for the session, we hope that the programme will be balanced and comprehensive, with a negotiating mandate for the four core items on the Conference agenda, in particular nuclear disarmament. That is not an easy task, though, given the long-standing lack of progress in the Conference and the complexities of the issues at hand. However, your role as the first President of the Conference in 2019 is key to kick-starting transparent and broad consultations with a view to bringing the Conference back to substantive work and developing a balanced and comprehensive programme of work for 2019.

The 2018 decision of the Conference contained in document CD/2119, which established five subsidiary bodies to explore possible common understanding on the four core issues, as well as on agenda items 5, 6 and 7, was merely a starting point. To a certain extent, the five subsidiary bodies helped deepen the technical discussions by the Conference members. They are far from nearing any consensus, however, due to very differing positions concerning the core issues. It should also be noted that the decision contained in document CD/2119 was taken for 2018, without

prejudice to any subsequent decision at the beginning of the next annual session of the Conference.

Fourthly, we are all best advised to act before we preach to others, or at least not to preach what we know we do not do; otherwise, the hypocrisy would be outstandingly revealing. Those who have demonstrated no respect for the rule of law, disdained their own words, violated a consensus-based Security Council resolution and even gone so far as to push others to follow their unlawful pathway do not have any moral ground to prescribe a code of behaviour for others.

Fifthly, since one delegation unjustly named my country in the context of its rhetoric about another member State, I should like to highlight the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran is proud to have acted as a principled, law-abiding nation, despite continuing malign actions, pressure and provocation. Was it the Islamic Republic of Iran that unilaterally and impulsively withdrew from an agreement that had been negotiated multilaterally and endorsed by the Security Council? I guess everyone knows the answer. Iran's impeccable performance under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action has been verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency more than 13 times, meaning that the agreement has survived only because of Iran's exceptional sense of responsibility, despite its being unilaterally and unjustly deprived of the deal's dividends. What did Iran do in reaction to this wrongful act by the United States? We resorted to the International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations to seek a remedy against the unlawful, unilateral coercive measure taken by the United States. We obtained an order from the Court that obliged the United States to drop its unlawful sanctions that targeted Iranian citizens by inhumanely impeding their access to medicines and other basic commodities. And the reaction of the United States was exemplary indeed, very telling in terms of showcasing its true faith in the rule of law, ethics and human rights. It opted to annihilate the whole Treaty that was the basis for the Court's jurisdiction.

To conclude my remarks on a very positive note, Mr. President, I would like to welcome our colleagues, the distinguished Ambassadors of China, India and Ecuador, to the Conference and I look forward to working with them. I should also like to welcome Ms. Day to the secretariat and wish her success. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Iran for his statement and for the kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, followed by the Ambassador of Germany.

Mr. Han Tae-song (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the first presidency of the 2019 session of the Conference on Disarmament. You may rest assured of my delegation's full cooperation.

It is the common desire of humankind to live in peace, and the complexity of the international security environment, as well as the lack of progress in global disarmament, demonstrates once again the importance of the Conference as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. The long-standing stalemate in the Conference is a call for all Conference members to show their political will and redouble their efforts, so that the Conference delivers on its mandate.

Last year, our efforts to make a breakthrough in the Conference's work resulted in the creation of five subsidiary bodies that allowed us to conduct substantive and in-depth discussions on the core items on the Conference agenda. Although it is regrettable that the Conference failed to adopt a programme of work, we all share the same goal of overcoming the current deadlock and bringing the Conference back to work.

It is my sincere hope that the Conference will build on the significant work done last year and continue its efforts to produce a substantive result this year, in accordance with the high expectations of the international community. To that end, my delegation is ready to fully engage in the Conference's activities during this year's session.

Mr. President, last year witnessed a dramatic change in the situation of the Korean Peninsula, which was unimaginable in the past. With a determination to put an end to the abnormal state on the Peninsula, which has been under constant danger of war, and to safeguard the peace and stability of the region, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea took proactive and bold measures from the outset of last year.

The three rounds of inter-Korean summit meetings and talks that took place last year turned the North-South relationship into one of trust and reconciliation and resulted in the adoption of the Panmunjom Declaration and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018, which reflect a firm resolve to open a new era of peace on the Korean Peninsula. The first-ever Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States summit meeting, a historic meeting, and the talks brought about a dramatic turn in the bilateral relationship, which had been the most hostile on Earth, and made a great contribution to ensuring the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula and the region.

As Chairman Kim Jong-un of the State Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea clarified in his New Year's address, it is the invariable position and firm will of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to establish a new bilateral relationship, as indicated in the 12 June 2018 Joint Statement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, build a lasting and durable peace mechanism and advance towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Accordingly, we declared that we would not make or test nuclear weapons any longer, use them or contribute to their proliferation, and we have taken various practical measures. If the United States responds to our efforts with trustworthy measures and corresponding practical actions, the bilateral relations will develop wonderfully, at a fast pace, as more definite and epoch-making steps are taken. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to fulfil its responsibility to establish a permanent and durable peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula and make efforts to obtain results that can be welcomed by the international community.

Mr. President, the stabilized situation on the Korean Peninsula and in the region is not something that has been easily created, and the countries that truly desire peace have the common responsibility to value highly the current situation.

I take this opportunity to express my expectation that the international community will extend its support to our sincere position and efforts to promote the positive development of the situation on the Korean Peninsula and spare no effort to encourage the current trend towards peace and stability. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Germany, followed by the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you. Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, Germany fully supports the statement delivered by the European Union. Mr. President, first let me congratulate you on your assumption of the first Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament during its 2019 session. Please be assured of Germany's ongoing and full support for you and your office.

Mr. President, we need to look at the present state of the Conference in the light of the immense challenges the world is facing: the multilateral and rules-based order is being increasingly challenged, instability is growing and the prospect of a new arms race is, unfortunately, real, in terms of numbers as well as through technological developments. The uncertain fate of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty casting clouds over an extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty is the most recent example that highlights the significant pressure that the international security architecture is under.

We must counter the erosion of treaties and systems that have for decades contributed to international security and stability. In doing so, we need to use the potential of all forums available, including the Conference. Yet we, as States unanimously entrusted to do so by all United Nations Member States at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, are not living up to the mandate of this institution. Mr. President, colleagues, we cannot just allow ourselves to lose our grip on a body like this,

which is a repository of every possibility for constructive communication and sustainable solutions.

The 2018 session of the Conference mirrored the increasingly tense and difficult international political and security environment. In this respect, the erratic roller-coaster ride we saw in the Conference did not come as a surprise. Nevertheless, work in the five subsidiary bodies established pursuant to the decision contained in document CD/2119 of last year's Conference achieved considerable productivity, and four of the five subsidiary bodies closed with reports. We saw interactive in-depth discussions on all of the topics debated. This experience gave us a glimpse of the great potential this institution still has.

We believe that progress is urgently needed on all the topics under the Conference's authority, but this is possible only if we are ready to engage with one another: further developments as regards nuclear disarmament are necessary to pave the way for the 2020 Review Conference. We must also maintain our efforts to enter negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. This still represents the next practical step, long overdue, towards living up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Likewise, negative security assurances would constitute a very efficient tool to increase confidence between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. As a consequence, they would benefit the global security environment overall. Lastly, space confronts us with new challenges that do not allow for further postponement of substantial discussions and require common efforts.

Our primary effort and endeavour, Mr. President, should be targeted at agreeing on a programme of work as a basis for commencing substantive negotiations in the various work strands. In the absence of such a programme of work, last year's establishment of subsidiary bodies proved to be a constructive way ahead. In the light of this experience – and should a programme of work turn out to be once again politically unachievable – Germany is very much in favour of resuming the work of the subsidiary bodies in 2019 in order to continue the fruitful debates of last year.

With regard to the impending Review Conference, we are all aware that we are standing at a critical juncture. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has served us well for half a century, curbing nuclear proliferation and incrementally raising safeguard standards. Clearly, the wisdom of this landmark Treaty lies in its careful balance of priorities. Only by fully recommitting to all three pillars can we prepare the ground for a successful future. That includes significant efforts towards nuclear disarmament. The 2010 action plan gives ample guidance for practical steps, with commitments to increased transparency on nuclear arsenals, progress on nuclear disarmament verification, reducing the role of nuclear weapons in doctrines and strategies and lowering the alert status of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, genuine dialogue is possible, so let us try to get back to substantive work as soon as possible and on the basis of what is achievable. Germany stands ready again to do its share of our joint work and even more if so asked.

Let me conclude by drawing your attention to the challenges posed by emerging issues, which I mentioned just before in the context of space. We need to start thinking about the imperatives of arms control in the twenty-first century. How will new technologies affect existing arms-control regimes? How will we be better placed to take account of technologies that have the potential to change the nature of warfare? In order to advance such reflections, my Minister, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, will host an international conference on new technologies and their ramifications for arms control. This conference is scheduled to take place in Berlin on 15 March. You should all have received a save-the-date message by now, and we are looking forward to your contributions and insights. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Germany for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Jadoon (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. I congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. We welcome the distinguished Ambassadors of China, India and Ecuador to the Conference, as well as the new Secretary of the Conference, and look

forward to working with all of them. We also thank Mr. Møller for his thoughtful remarks last week.

My delegation supports the request made by Palestine to participate in the work of the Conference as an observer and regrets that it could not be approved. Mr. President, Pakistan attaches very high importance to the work of the Conference and remains committed to its effective functioning. As the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body, the Conference is an integral and vital part of the United Nations disarmament machinery and has produced landmark treaties in the past.

The strength of the Conference lies in the fact that all militarily significant States participate in it on an equal footing and are able to protect their vital security interests under the consensus rule. These attributes are indispensable for any forum dealing with disarmament and security issues. The impasse faced by the Conference is a result of the prevailing strategic environment and the lack of political will to cooperatively advance the goals of international and regional peace and security, and disarmament, on a non-discriminatory basis. It is not related to the Conference's working methods or its rules of procedure.

Mr. President, Pakistan remains committed to the goal of complete nuclear disarmament in a universal, verifiable and non-discriminatory manner and supports the start of negotiations towards this goal in the Conference. As recognized by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the objective of this process should be undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments and military forces.

Pakistan also supports the commencement of long-overdue negotiations on negative security assurances. This issue has been on the Conference's agenda since its very first session, held 40 years ago. Pending nuclear disarmament, the genuine aspiration of non-nuclear-weapon States to receive legally binding guarantees against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons from all nuclear-weapon-possessing States should be embodied in a universal treaty concluded by the Conference.

The issue of preventing an arms race in outer space, too, is eminently ripe for negotiations on a legally binding treaty supported by Pakistan. Such a treaty would contribute to international peace and security by preventing outer space, the common heritage of all humankind, from emerging as a new realm of conflict and military competition.

Pakistan also stands ready to join substantive work in the Conference on other emerging issues with a direct impact on international peace and security, such as cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons and chemical and biological terrorism.

Mr. President, any prospective treaty on arms control, non-proliferation or disarmament that does not provide equitable security benefits to all States would be a non-starter, as evidenced by the failure to start negotiations in the Conference on a treaty partially dealing with fissile material production. Pakistan's consistent position on a fissile material treaty remains unchanged. We believe that a treaty that results only in the cut-off in the production of fissile material, as envisaged under the Shannon Mandate and favoured by the other nuclear-weapon States holding large stockpiles of such materials, would contribute little to nuclear disarmament. It would jeopardize Pakistan's security, unless it addressed the vast asymmetries in existing stocks of fissile material. This situation has been further compounded by the blatant disregard for non-proliferation norms and the exercise of double standards for achieving short-sighted political objectives and economic benefits which endanger strategic stability in South Asia and beyond.

Pakistan cannot join any discussion, pre-negotiation, negotiation or preparatory work on a fissile material treaty on the basis of the Shannon Mandate. The Mandate has outlived its utility and validity as the basis for substantive work on a treaty. Major divergences continue to persist on the most fundamental aspects of the treaty's objective and scope, which need to be resolved beforehand, to the satisfaction of all parties. As long as consensus on these two fundamental aspects eludes us, as is the case now, any work

towards other closely interlinked elements, such as definitions, verification and legal and institutional arrangements, would be premature and lopsided.

Mr. President, my delegation is of the view that disagreement over the start of formal negotiations in the Conference should not prevent us from holding substantive discussions on all agenda items. The informal discussions held in the five subsidiary bodies last year, as well as in earlier years in the format of the working group on the way ahead and under schedules of activities, featured valuable and in-depth consideration of all relevant issues. They helped in developing a better understanding of each other's concerns and expectations, providing an opportunity to build on the convergences and to narrow down the differences. We see merit in sustaining this work.

Mr. President, we take note of your opening remarks last week in which you expressed the intention to develop a draft programme of work for our consideration. For a consensus-based body like the Conference, any draft decision must only be presented after holding thorough consultations in a transparent and inclusive manner and should be geared towards meeting the approval of all member States. Let me assure you that my delegation, within the confines of our national position outlined just now, will cooperate with you most constructively in reaching a balanced and comprehensive framework for holding substantive work, which can enjoy consensus, in the Conference this year. We need to be realistic and practical by focusing on areas that have the potential to unite us rather than those that would prove divisive. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Pakistan for his statement and for his kind words for the President and would now like to give the floor to the representative of Finland, followed by the representative of Italy.

Ms. Hakala (Finland): Mr. President, first I would like to congratulate you on assuming your role as President of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of my delegation's full support. On behalf of my delegation, I would also like to welcome Ambassador Li Song of China, Ambassador Sharma of India and Ambassador Izquierdo Miño of Ecuador, as well as the new Secretary of the Conference, Ms. Day, to the disarmament community.

Finland aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union at the first meeting of the Conference, including the European Union's call for Russia to urgently address the serious concerns expressed about its compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in a substantial and transparent way.

Allow me to add some remarks in my national capacity. Mr. President, Finland believes that upholding and developing the rules-based multilateral system is the way to tackle the increasingly numerous and complex problems of global security. Last May, when the United Nations Secretary-General presented his Agenda for Disarmament, he said: "The paradox is that when each country pursues its own security without regard for others, we create global insecurity that threatens us all. Disarmament – including arms control, non-proliferation, prohibitions, restrictions, confidence-building and, where needed, elimination – is an essential tool to secure our world and our future." With these words, the Secretary-General reminded us of the goal of our work.

That said, the Conference's work is a product of its time. In the current global security situation, we realize that agreeing on a programme of work can be a distant goal. We do salute your ambition in trying to reach this goal, and Finland is ready to work constructively and in good cooperation with other delegations in order to achieve it.

Mr. President, despite the long-lasting stalemate in negotiations, in recent years, smaller advances have made it possible to pave the way for new disarmament treaties. The informal working group of 2015 was mandated to produce a programme of work. Even though this was not achievable, it gave States members of the Conference the possibility to discuss options transparently. The discussions resulted in a consensus report. In 2017, the working group on the way ahead identified issues for substantive work and areas of common ground for a programme of work with a negotiation mandate. Last year, the five subsidiary bodies focused on substantive work on the items on the Conference agenda, with four reports being adopted.

When larger steps are not possible, Finland sees the value of continuing the path towards disarmament through the preparation of negotiations. At this stage, the least the Conference could do would, in our opinion, be to agree to establish subsidiary bodies to take up from where the work ended last year. Providing more targeted questions for deliberation could streamline the work of the subsidiary bodies.

We believe that this year the substance of the Conference's work should include at least advancing towards a fissile material cut-off treaty and improving negative security assurances.

Mr. President, in order to advance disarmament to the fullest, all genders' concerns and experiences should be part of the discussions. We call for gender equality in disarmament, meaning inclusive delegations, as well as taking into account the differing impact of weapons on genders. We commend Latvia, the President of the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, for prioritizing gender and arms-related gender-based violence during its presidency of the Conference and hope that this effort serves as an example for other disarmament regimes. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Finland for her statement and for her kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Italy, followed by the Ambassador of Austria.

Mr. Incarnato (Italy): Mr. President, thank you for giving me the floor. At the outset, let me congratulate you on your assumption of responsibility as the first President of the 2019 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Please rest assured of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me add some remarks in my national capacity. Mr. President, Italy firmly believes that multilateralism and international cooperation are crucial for effective and long-term results in disarmament and non-proliferation. We remain committed to promoting these values and approaches in all relevant forums. The current security situation, characterized by growing tensions, arms proliferation and a fast-changing environment, adds a new sense of urgency to our efforts.

The Conference is the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body, and its role remains crucial. We fully understand and share the sense of frustration stemming from the long impasse in the Conference's work, which is regrettable. We remain convinced that the Conference is an indispensable and unique body in the toolbox of the disarmament community, even though its potential remains clearly unfulfilled. It is up to us to act in order to preserve and relaunch its role.

Italy appreciated the constructive and substantive discussions held last year in the five subsidiary bodies to reach an understanding on the areas of commonalities, deepen technical discussions, broaden areas of agreement and consider effective measures, including legal instruments for negotiations. We commend the coordinators for their efforts and leadership in bringing forward this important work, in accordance with the mandate of the subsidiary bodies. The adoption of four substantive reports for the first time in years is an important step forward and can provide a solid basis to build on in 2019. At the same time, we regret that the Conference could not agree on a substantive final report; that would have been of the utmost importance in order to reflect the important work that was carried out in the five subsidiary bodies.

Mr. President, we look forward to your proposal on a programme of work and support your efforts to reach an agreement on it. For Italy, the immediate resumption of negotiations within the Conference remains a priority. At the same time, should it not be possible to find consensus on a programme of work, Italy would support the re-establishment of subsidiary bodies so as allow further structured and technical discussions throughout the 2019 session.

Mr. President, Italy fully shares the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons and is firmly committed to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation as essential components of its foreign policy. In this regard, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of the international regime, with its three mutually reinforcing, pillars: non-proliferation, disarmament and promotion of peaceful

uses of nuclear energy. We call upon States that have not yet done so to join the Treaty as non-nuclear-weapon States, without delay and without conditions.

The prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is also one of our key priorities. We call on all States that have not yet done so, particularly the remaining eight annex 2 States, to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay. We continue to support the immediate commencement of negotiations within the Conference on a treaty dealing with fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

We welcome the report of the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/259. We believe it would be important to build on the group's work and enrich with its fruitful input our negotiations of such a treaty within the Conference. Pending its inclusion, we believe that all relevant States should abide by a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. We also support the resumption of substantive discussions on negative security assurances, within the context of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work, with a view to elaborating recommendations dealing with all their aspects, not excluding an internationally legally binding instrument.

Nuclear-weapon States bear fundamental responsibility for the implementation of article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. While welcoming the reductions made so far by most of those States, we encourage them to seek further reductions in their nuclear arsenals. We express satisfaction at the announcement by the Russian Federation and the United States that they met the central limits of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in February 2018. We encourage them to extend the Treaty and to pursue further discussions on confidence-building, transparency, verification activities and reporting.

For over 30 years, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty has been crucial in upholding European security. Today, we are seriously concerned about the future of the Treaty and we believe that no effort should be spared to preserve it and to ensure its full and verifiable implementation. We therefore call upon Russia to demonstrate its compliance with the Treaty in a substantial and transparent way.

Italy also values all initiatives undertaken in the field of nuclear disarmament verification as important tools to build trust and confidence among nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States. In this regard, we support the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and welcome the work of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, in the light of the increasing tendency to take disarmament negotiations out of the Conference, today more than ever we face the concrete risk of the marginalization of the Conference, and ultimately of its irrelevance. At the same time, the deteriorating security environment calls for renewed determination to advance our shared disarmament goals and adds a new sense of urgency to our efforts. We are aware of the extremely positive results we can achieve when diplomacy works. After a deeply troubling 2017, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear and missile tests ruthlessly threatened international peace and security, as well as the non-proliferation regime, in the first half of 2018 the high-level talks between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, together with the Singapore Summit between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, brought about positive developments. We strongly hope that such steps may be conducive to an open and constructive dialogue, aimed at fulfilling our common goal of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Another important example of the results that can be achieved through diplomacy is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This agreement remains a key element in the context of international efforts aiming to strengthen the non-proliferation architecture and plays a crucial role in promoting regional and international security.

We firmly believe that the international community needs to remain committed to the full and effective implementation of the Plan of Action, as long as Iran continues to strictly abide by its nuclear-related commitments. We also reiterate the importance of the full and effective implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015).

Before concluding, Mr. President, allow me to stress once again that my country stands ready to work with all partners to advance disarmament goals and values in the Conference on Disarmament and in all other relevant forums, starting with the upcoming third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference.

Furthermore, Italy believes that greater interaction of the Conference on Disarmament with civil society, broadly encompassing academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, could make a key contribution to our work, as attested to, for example, by the very useful input provided by experts to last year's subsidiary bodies, which helped deepen our technical discussions and substantially enriched our debate. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Italy for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Austria, followed by the Syrian Arab Republic.

Ms. Tichy-Fisslberger (Austria): Thank you, Mr. President. Austria aligns itself with the European Union statement delivered last week.

In our national capacity, let me add the following remarks. First of all, like others, we welcome all new colleagues to this interesting Conference. Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control have returned to the centre stage of global politics. Unimaginable suffering caused by weapons of mass destruction has reared its ugly head in the twenty-first century, when many had assumed that the world had closed that dark chapter of its history. The long-ignored global dangers of nuclear weapons have also returned into sharp focus. We must take this as a call to action and press on to make progress on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Their effective implementation contributes to safeguarding international peace and security. Times of geopolitical tension increase the urgency of efforts by the disarmament community.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty has been a pillar of European security for the last three decades. Thanks to this Treaty, almost 3,000 missiles with nuclear and conventional warheads have been removed and verifiably destroyed. Its preservation as a viable treaty is of crucial importance. We call for constructive dialogue between the two parties to address compliance concerns in a substantive and transparent way, uphold the Treaty and safeguard its security benefits. The erosion of the Treaty will have serious consequences not only for the security of the States parties and Europe but also for the whole world.

Currently, there is a close focus on the security climate, with attempts to justify the attempted rollback of legal obligations and even the upgrading of arsenals. This stands in direct contrast to what we here in the Conference on Disarmament have unwaveringly been working on – that is, to uphold, strengthen and further enhance the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms-control architecture. Rather than increase tensions through military build-ups, the disarmament regime provides us with mechanisms to defuse them. It is specifically in difficult circumstances that we must make use of the multilateral forums that provide an opportunity to engage in dialogue, including on sensitive issues, and restore trust. Let us make use of effective multilateralism and find peaceful solutions to the many pressing security challenges we face. History shows what can be achieved.

In fact, some of the most crucial disarmament agreements were adopted in times of increased tension. It was in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, that the long and protracted efforts to negotiate a partial test ban accelerated. In August 1963, only nine months after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Partial Test Ban Treaty opened for signature. In the same year, on 27 November 1963, the General Assembly adopted resolution 1911 laying the foundation for the denuclearization of Latin America, which culminated in the creation of the first regional nuclear-weapon-free zone five years later.

In the past, the Conference has achieved outstanding successes and made effective contributions in the multilateral arena. The treaties negotiated in the Conference shaped the disarmament regime and enhanced international security over the long term. The

Conference negotiated landmark treaties, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

On the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, we applaud the latest ratification, by Thailand, an annex 2 State. It is a clear sign of the continued importance of the Treaty and a demonstration of disarmament being taken seriously. Outstanding annex 2 States should stop delaying their own accessions as they wait for others to join before them. It is high time for them, too, to lead by example and finally bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force.

Despite the stalemate of more than two decades, my delegation continues to believe that the Conference has the potential to fulfil the mandate assigned to it by the international community. The Conference could again make a contribution to the enhancement of global peace and stability. The Austrian delegation fully supports your efforts, Mr. President, to build consensus on a programme of work. We trust in your able leadership to bring the Conference closer to breaking the impasse.

Mr. President, preventing the humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, with their disastrous short- and long-term effects for our planet, is the core concern underlying our disarmament efforts. Therefore, for my delegation, progress on nuclear disarmament remains the top priority on the Conference agenda, all the more as geopolitical tensions heighten the risk of nuclear conflict. In the current state of affairs, we consider it essential to reinforce the taboo against all weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological and nuclear.

Next year will conclude the important review cycle for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as part of which the status of the implementation of the Treaty and commitments agreed by consensus in previous review cycles are reviewed. My delegation will spare no effort to contribute to a positive outcome with a view to strengthening the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Disarmament and non-proliferation are two sides of the same coin. Efforts on non-proliferation and disarmament are mutually reinforcing. We remain convinced that, unless credible progress is achieved on disarmament, the proliferation pressure will increase. We are faced today with signs of dangerous backsliding on nuclear disarmament. With the current geopolitical tensions, increasing investment in military capabilities and the development of new weapon systems, trust and stability will continue to erode. If national security continues to be pursued primarily through expensive weapon modernization and means-of-delivery enhancement programmes, the danger of an arms race spiral will be difficult to avert.

This narrowly focused approach to security, to the detriment of global security, is dangerously short-sighted. The humanitarian impact of a nuclear detonation, regardless of its cause, is and must be part of the equation in respect of the security dimension of nuclear weapons. The quest by some for alleged security benefits through nuclear weapons leads to increased risks for all. We continue to welcome the significant reductions in numbers that have been achieved since the peak of the cold war, but that trend has unfortunately slowly ground to a halt, with more than 14,000 nuclear weapons remaining in existence. Given the potentially existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, urgent action is crucial. Working towards a world free of nuclear weapons is a shared responsibility of all States. Therefore, broader discussion of the consequences, risks, legality and morality of nuclear weapons needs to be continued and adequately reflected.

Austria would also welcome more deliberations on the perceived role of those weapons in security doctrines. Mr. President, in today's world, tangible progress towards realizing our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons should be pursued with an even greater sense of urgency. As experience with other weapons of mass destruction has shown, in order to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, it is essential to unequivocally prohibit them. A clear majority of United Nations Member States therefore adopted the historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. The Treaty is an indispensable step towards the long-sought total elimination of nuclear weapons. Further legal and practical measures are required to achieve total elimination of nuclear weapons. Building on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's clear disarmament obligations, the

adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons brings us closer to implementing article VI and constitutes tangible progress towards the implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and commitments undertaken by States parties.

Mr. President, at this particularly challenging juncture, the Conference once again has the opportunity to make a positive contribution to improving the current international security climate. We encourage all Conference members to seize this opportunity. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Austria for her statement and for her kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. I should like to begin by welcoming our new colleagues, Ambassador Li Song of China and Ambassador Pankaj Sharma, Permanent Representative of India, to the Conference on Disarmament and to wish them every success in the tasks entrusted to them. I also wish to welcome the Ambassador of Ecuador and Ms. Radha Day, the new Secretary of the Conference.

The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the importance it attaches to the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament and to the preservation of its role, status and mandate. We underscore the importance in this context of adhering to the priorities that were set by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in particular the top priority accorded to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. On the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament, we sincerely hope that the Conference will demonstrate its ability to achieve a long-awaited breakthrough, if its members possess the requisite political will.

Syria actively contributed to the collective efforts of the six presidencies during last year's session to reactivate the Conference and restore its substantive negotiating role based on the agenda. Their efforts led to the adoption of the decision contained in document CD/2119 and the establishment of five subsidiary bodies with a view to developing partnerships conducive to the achievement of that goal. The endeavour to develop a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that preserves the Conference's negotiating mandate and reflects member States' concerns was the focus of our attention during my country's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

Unfortunately these joint and individual efforts, which generated a positive atmosphere concerning the possibility of ending the deadlock in the Conference, were confronted by intransigent political positions that obstructed the meetings of the Conference and its subsidiary bodies and held them hostage to political agendas. Such conduct overshadowed the outcome and culminated in action by the United States to impede the adoption of the annual report on the work of the Conference to the General Assembly.

The modern world is confronted with many challenges, and humankind faces existential risks stemming from the existence, use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as the risk of militarization and an arms race in outer space. These challenges are compounded by the increasing failure to comply with obligations under the multilateral disarmament agenda of the United Nations, including nuclear disarmament obligations, and the renewed adoption of extremist military doctrines that accord priority to nuclear weapons and actually threaten to use such weapons. There has also been a growing trend towards unilateralism in the use or threat of use of force in international relations, in violation of the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. A further development has been the spread of terrorism as a means of undermining States' stability and targeting their political systems, and as a pretext for interfering in their internal affairs. There is also an increased risk of terrorist groups acquiring and using chemical weapons.

Accordingly, Syria underscores the importance of recognizing disarmament as a top priority of the international community and as a core component of the collective security system, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. It also emphasizes the importance, in the context of the international order, of respecting the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of States and of refraining from any

interference in their internal affairs. Syria agrees with the warning issued by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, concerning the risk of being driven by the illusion that security can be achieved through the possession and exercise of military force rather than through wisdom based on dialogue and international cooperation.

The arrogant power policy pursued by the United States and its allies in our region has caused humanitarian disasters for which the peoples of our region and their countries continue to pay the price. The United States Administration's encouragement of the aggressive conduct of its ally Israel and its protection of Israel from accountability for its repeated attacks on Syrian territory constitute a prototype of irresponsible policies that threaten the stability of the Middle East and international peace and security.

The United States and its allies have persistently evaded their commitment to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, although it constitutes a legal obligation pursuant to the set of resolutions guaranteeing the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons adopted in 1995. This has encouraged Israel to continue refusing to accede to the Treaty as a non-nuclear-weapon State party and place its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to deny possessing various types of weapons of mass destruction and to refuse to accede to treaties related to the prohibition and prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The failure to convene an international conference on the establishment of a zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in 2012, in accordance with the decision contained in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty, and the subsequent failure of the 2015 Review Conference because known States, including two depositary States of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, renounced their contractual responsibilities and obligations under the Treaty in order to support Israel, which is not a party to the Treaty, undermined the credibility and sustainability of the system established by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Syrian Arab Republic therefore considers that the basic prerequisites for the success of the forthcoming 2020 Review Conference are full implementation of the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty and vigorous action to achieve the goal of establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Mr. President, the Fourth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which failed to adopt the final document, missed an important opportunity at the end of last year to assess the implementation of the Convention and to review measures taken during the previous five years. Its failure to adopt the document was due to the continuous politicization of the Convention by the United States and its insistence on including controversial issues as part of its hostile approach to my country, Syria, and its false allegations that Syria has used chemical weapons. The United States applied double standards in this regard, ignoring the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria and failing to condemn the targeting by terrorist organizations of residential districts in Aleppo with toxic chemical gases during the Review Conference of the Convention held last November. It also sought to obstruct the investigations and influence their results.

It is both surprising and ironic that the United States, which calls itself a responsible State and assumes the right to deliver instructions to other States on compliance with their obligations, ignores its track record of violating its own treaty obligations. While its representatives deliver lectures on compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, it continues to invoke illusory pretexts in order to avoid fulfilling its obligation to dispose of its chemical weapons, despite having exceeded the applicable time limits. Its status is unique as the only party to the Convention that still possesses the world's largest arsenal of chemical weapons.

Lastly, Mr. President, the Syrian Arab Republic, which is aware of the complex nature of the issues falling within the purview of the Conference and of the wide range of positions held on those issues in the current international situation, underscores that the ability of the Conference to emerge successfully from its current state of prevarication and

stagnation depends to a large extent on compliance by successive presidencies with the obligation to base their work on the rules of procedure of the Conference and on the principles of responsibility and transparency that govern the presidency's role and requirements. It is essential to focus on the mandate, role and agenda of the Conference and to seek consensus on a programme of work. Syria supports the adoption of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work, with a negotiating mandate that comprises the four core issues on the agenda of the Conference as well as emerging challenges, including the negotiation of a convention aimed at combating terrorist groups' access to chemical weapons and preventing their use of such weapons. We are fully prepared in this context to support your efforts and to cooperate with you during your presidency of the Conference. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his kind words for the presidency and would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, followed by the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Lee Jang-keun (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President, let me first join the other delegations in congratulating you on your assumption of this year's first presidency. I assure you of my delegation's full support and hope that, under your stewardship, this year's work in this body will take off successfully with renewed commitment to making progress. I would also like to welcome new colleagues, Ambassador Li Song of China and Ambassador Sharma of India, and wish them great success.

As several speakers mentioned last week and today, we are entering another challenging year in an increasingly volatile and worsening global security situation. Many consider that the international security environment is in its worst state since the end of the cold war. Global military expenditure is at its peak, and the arms race has been revived. Conflicts are protracted, while trust and multilateralism are receding. This reality, however, means that expectations of the Conference on Disarmament are higher, not lower. Disarmament and non-proliferation remain central tools for global peace and security.

Moreover, as we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Conference and the centenary of multilateralism in Geneva this year, my delegation sincerely hopes that we will make meaningful progress in our work and deliver our expected mandate to the world. To this end, my delegation believes that the Conference needs to take more pragmatic approaches.

Firstly, we must maintain the momentum created in the last two years – namely, through the working group on the way ahead and the subsidiary bodies. Substantive discussions within these frameworks have clarified member States' views and positions. Such discussions not only enhanced mutual understanding but also served to build transparency among member States. The controversy caused by the ambiguity in the decisions contained in document CD/2119 and document CD/2126 has mainly concerned procedural issues rather than substantive ones. The benefits we gained through frank and interactive dialogues have greater weight than the cost we paid via procedural argument. I also believe we will be able to avoid unnecessary confrontations by crafting clearer formulations for this year's decisions.

Secondly, we must direct our discussions to more specific items. We do not need to repeat general exchanges of views. Rather, we must take a closer look at concrete issues. For instance, last year we dealt with risk reduction measures in subsidiary bodies 1 and 2, and many delegations, including mine, emphasized the need to narrow the scope of the subject. In subsidiary body 3, the removal of the imminent risks posed by space debris was salient. In subsidiary bodies 4 and 5, we identified what can be agreed on and what needs further examination. While keeping in mind the legitimate need to adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work for this year, we can still meticulously review focused issues in preparing future negotiations.

Thirdly, we must capitalize on the authority and centrality of the Conference as the single multilateral disarmament negotiation forum by engaging with other disarmament mechanisms. Such active and flexible engagement will enable us to grasp wider views on convoluted disarmament issues.

For instance, it would be conducive to the work of the Conference if interactive dialogues were held with the chairs of various governmental expert groups and presidents of existing disarmament conventions. As the implementation plan of the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament was unveiled after the closure of the Conference, it would also be helpful to be updated on its current status.

Mr. President, taking this opportunity and following the statement by Ambassador Han of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea just minutes ago, I would also like to share with you and our colleagues information on the situation on the Korean Peninsula. As we may all recall, there was high tension on the Korean Peninsula until just a year ago. However, the Pyeongchang Olympic Winter Games held in February last year were an occasion which opened a window for dialogue, followed by the so-called surge in diplomacy for peace on the Korean Peninsula, as the leaders of South and North Korea held three rounds of summits. The first-ever summit between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea took place in Singapore.

At the summit, the three leaders confirmed their shared goals of complete denuclearization of and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. Speaking of the Inter-Korean Summit, the Pyongyang Joint Declaration, in which the two leaders not only reaffirmed their commitment to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula but also agreed on concrete measures to be taken to this end, was signed at the Pyongyang Summit last September. The Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain was signed and attached to the Declaration. In the Agreement, the military authorities of South and North Korea agreed on the following five important measures:

First, South and North Korea agreed to completely cease all hostile acts against each other in every domain, including land, air and sea.

Second, the two Koreas agreed to devise substantive military measures to transform the demilitarized zone into a peace zone.

Third, both sides agreed to take military measures to prevent accidental military clashes and ensure safe fishing activities by turning the area around the Northern Limit Line in the West Sea into a maritime peace zone.

Fourth, the two Koreas agreed to devise military assurance measures necessary for invigorating exchanges, cooperation, contacts and visits.

Fifth, the two sides agreed to devise various measures for mutual military confidence-building.

As part of the implementation of the Agreement, a joint landmine removal project was successfully carried out in the Joint Security Area and in some areas of the demilitarized zone last October. We believe that such confidence-building measures will also reinforce the international effort towards the denuclearization of and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Mr. President, as we open a new year, we are determined to seize this hard-won, unprecedented window of opportunity for diplomacy. The recent announcement by the United States of a second summit meeting between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in late February is another harbinger of hope. We welcome all the recent diplomatic efforts to make this happen and honestly hope to see these efforts come to eventual fruition so as to make substantial progress, but such success also requires the wholehearted encouragement and support of the international community, including everyone in this room.

With your support and prayers, I do wish that Korea will be able to bring hope for peace around the world as well. I will be more than happy to update you further on important developments in our efforts towards the complete denuclearization of and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Kazi (Bangladesh): Thank you, Mr. President. We take the floor to reaffirm our delegation's abiding confidence in the potential of the Conference on Disarmament as the most relevant and legitimate multilateral forum for negotiations on disarmament issues. We lend our support to your approach to a comprehensive and balanced programme of work, with reference to the work of the five subsidiary bodies.

The Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament enjoined this Conference to forge ahead with negotiations and discussions on all its core agenda items. We subscribe to the views expressed by a number of delegations that there is scope for a certain degree of creativity and flexibility within the consensus approach that forms the bedrock of the Conference's work.

There is broad-based recognition of the worth of the work done by the subsidiary bodies in facilitating informed discussions in their respective mandated areas. In case of renewed challenges with the programme of work, it would certainly be useful to sustain the momentum created by the subsidiary bodies, including to achieve substantive outcomes on issues of critical importance to our delegation, such as negative security assurances.

There are other emerging security concerns, including cybersecurity issues, that the Conference needs to remain mindful of. In order to stay relevant in the long term, the Conference should have the opportunity to factor in such issues within the agreed framework of its work. It is clear that the status quo in the Conference is not a desirable situation and that it must not give way to complacency in the current international security environment. In this fortieth year of the Conference, it is our shared responsibility to work towards advancing its work in an effective and meaningful way.

I wish to assure you, as the first President this year, that you can count on our delegation's continued support in discharging your responsibilities. I thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Bangladesh for his statement and for the kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Poland, followed by the Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. Czech (Poland): Mr. President, first of all, let me congratulate you on your assumption of this important duty. Please be assured of my delegation's full support. I would also like to give a warm welcome to the new Ambassadors from China, India and Ecuador.

Mr. President, Poland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and in its national capacity would like to offer the following remarks. It is a natural feeling that we start a new year with new hope. Having in mind the fruitful activity of the Conference on Disarmament in 2018, we look forward to further progress in 2019. We know what we would like to achieve, but the question is how to achieve it.

The Conference is an important part of the disarmament machinery, which is like an engine. It has been functioning, but the outcome of the work depends on its being powered by credible ideas and strong political will. We need to seek solutions to the negotiating stalemate outside the Conference. Poland, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, sees an urgent need to improve the overall security and disarmament climate. Our common goal remains the same: to maintain international peace and security, exactly as stated in the Charter of the United Nations. The first step in this direction is to address protracted bilateral and regional conflicts. We need to break a vicious circle of distrust. This notion of distrust refers to relations among people, but it also refers to relations among States.

Secondly, the multilateral system, including disarmament regimes, must be upheld. Respect for international law, for sovereignty and for the integrity of State territory and abiding by rules and agreements should be our guiding principles. Unfortunately, some agreements have been put in danger. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is one example. We are very worried by the long-standing concerns about the non-compliance of Russia with its obligations under the Treaty. The erosion of this Treaty is dangerous for stability and security, not only in Central Europe. It also refers to other States outside Europe. The announcement by the United States of its planned suspension of its Treaty activities is, in our view, a logical consequence of Russia's permanent violation of this

particular Treaty. We call on the Russian Federation to save the Treaty and to come back into compliance by eliminating the Novator 9M729 missiles, as well as its launchers, in a transparent and verifiable way.

Mr. President, the rapid development of new technologies, including those with military applications, is another issue which deserves our full attention. Regulations are lagging behind research and development and, in some cases, even behind the mass production of very sophisticated equipment, such as drones. Lethal autonomous weapon systems, robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity issues and supersonic weapons are becoming greater and greater challenges in our work.

Indeed, it is said that it is better to see a sign saying “no entry” than a sign saying “no way out”. This is also true for security and disarmament affairs. We must be cautious not to advance to the point of no return. The only way to avoid doing so is to continue engaging in dialogue, to intensify diplomatic efforts and to further integrate the international community; and we believe that the Conference still has a pivotal role to play in this particular respect. I thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Poland for his statement and for his kind words for the President and would now like to give the floor to the representative of Brazil, followed by the Ambassador of Canada.

Mr. Clabuchar Martingo (Brazil): Mr. President, Brazil congratulates you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Be assured of my country’s full cooperation in your endeavours as we begin this annual session. Let me also, on behalf of Ambassador Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota, welcome the new Permanent Representatives of China, Ambassador Li Song, of India, Ambassador Pankaj Sharma and of Ecuador, Ambassador Emilio Izquierdo Miño, as well as the new Secretary of the Conference, Ms. Radha Day.

Mr. President, the current international climate, fraught with security and political challenges as well as new and resurgent political tensions, increases the importance of functional and effective disarmament machinery. The community of nations must be able to cooperate constructively in the disarmament arena in order to steer developments towards peace and prosperity and away from conflict and brinksmanship. This Conference is a key cog in the disarmament machinery, and it is our responsibility to sustain the positive momentum from 2018 and build upon it. In order to do that, a timely decision on the structure for taking work forward is needed.

Brazil therefore fully supports the plans you have outlined for a programme of work focused on the Conference’s four core issues. We are ready to work with you towards its early adoption. If the approval of a programme of work proves elusive, Brazil will support creative alternatives to build upon the work of recent years to move progressively towards fulfilling the Conference’s negotiating mandate.

Brazil is flexible with regard to the contents of a programme of work or a decision that takes the Conference forward, as long as it builds upon and deepens the work carried out under the five subsidiary bodies established pursuant to the decisions contained in documents CD/2119 and CD/2126. Whichever arrangement we decide on, Brazil feels that it is important to recognize the singularities and different levels of maturity of each topic, without prejudice to the principles of comprehensiveness and balance.

It is equally important to recognize the most contentious issues under each topic, which will not be quickly or easily solved, and to try to work around them. We must move forward where possible and not wait for a wholesale solution to all Conference issues. It must be possible to make progress on more mature issues, such as the issue of a fissile material cut-off treaty and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, without having cross-conditionalities with other topics.

Lastly, Mr. President, Brazil would like to point out the importance of preserving the Conference as an institution, with due regard being given to its rules of procedure as well as the role of the succeeding presidencies. The Conference constitutes an *acquis* of the international community and must be protected in order to preserve the political space to

rebuild a substantive work agenda and relaunch its work, which is essential for international peace and security. I thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Brazil for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Canada, followed by the representative of Australia.

Ms. McCarney (Canada): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me congratulate you and assure you of my delegation's support and cooperation during your presidency. Let me also join others in welcoming new Conference on Disarmament colleagues from China, India and Ecuador and our new Secretary, Ms. Day.

Looking across the current landscape in these opening weeks of 2019, we can see that we are at a point of inflection in our common enterprise of advancing disarmament. Whether through insufficient funding or by outright disregard for agreed obligations and commitments, States are abdicating their responsibilities to uphold the international rules-based order. In this troubling environment, it is incumbent upon this Conference, foremost among such forums, to reinforce this endeavour and to reassert the crucial importance of our work. Central to this task is to revisit our core principle: fundamentally, that arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament are essential for the security interests of all States.

(spoke in French)

In examining more closely the immediate challenges that are paralysing this body's negotiating mandate, we share the view of many delegations that a level of flexibility is needed to make progress on our various agenda items. We share the view of the Netherlands, expressed last week, that the establishment of new disarmament measures should be the priority for this 2019 session. In the same vein, we are grateful for the efforts made by the Netherlands to give us a different perspective on our work and what is important, by comparing a programme of work to a simple scheduling tool. In this regard, Canada considers that, overall, the work of the Conference in 2018 was of great value in that it advanced our discussions on disarmament.

Through the subsidiary bodies, we have not only improved our common understanding of national positions on the agenda items, but also gone into greater depth in some areas, identifying issues or critical concepts that have made possible other work for this body. Even in the absence of consensus, the work of the subsidiary bodies has allowed us to make progress in 2018, and we should now build on this work in 2019. That said, some items are more ready for negotiation than others. I would like to join my voice to those of a number of delegations who, last week, and again today, cited the treaty banning the production of fissile material as a priority for negotiations.

(spoke in English)

Canada considers that forward movement on a fissile material cut-off treaty in the Conference is both timely and urgent. The consensus report of the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group, which has been transmitted to the Conference by the United Nations Secretary-General, is an excellent starting point for negotiations. If we cannot agree to negotiations in this forum on such a treaty, then we must pragmatically consider alternatives.

Mr. President, we also welcome your opening comments last week on the importance of bringing gender perspectives into our disarmament work. For Canada, it simply makes eminent sense to strive for inclusive processes and to foster a diversity of views on disarmament.

In concluding, I wish to express Canada's ongoing concern with the overall fragile state of the disarmament and arms-control architecture. While Conference members appear to have found a meaningful way to engage on the agenda items through subsidiary bodies, recent setbacks on arms control are worrying. Canada deeply regrets Russia's non-compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and its lack of constructive engagement, which threatens the viability of this landmark agreement.

The Treaty was born during the cold war, at a time of great geopolitical tension. It is thus a useful reminder for all of us of the crucial importance of constructive dialogue on arms control and disarmament for our collective security, even in the face of a challenging security environment, because in such situations only dialogue offers a way forward. In this context, we call on Russia and the United States to maintain channels for positive engagement on the Treaty to resolve their differences or risk the further fraying of the existing arms-control regime. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Canada for her statement and for her kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Australia, followed by the representative of Sweden.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President. It is not easy being the first President for the year in the Conference on Disarmament. Your presidency sets the tone and establishes the framework for our collective work this year. You have our full support. We also extend our welcome to new colleagues.

We approach this year with a mix of optimism and realism about what is possible for the Conference in 2019. The issues we work on go to the heart of national and international security concerns. None of this is easy, and we are fooling ourselves if we think that real, sustainable progress can be packaged neatly into the Conference's rather short annual sessions. The Conference is one of many tools at our disposal for managing international security challenges. It is up to the people in this room to use it wisely and effectively. This takes time – building trust and confidence through dialogue over many years.

Mr. President, in 2018, despite some disappointments, the Conference arguably did more substantive work than it had done in years. Turkey outlined this well in its statement last week. Several delegations have already indicated a desire to build on this work in 2019. We support this. We thank you for your intention to put forward a draft programme of work later this week. We look forward to consultations on the draft. We commend your intention to reference the work of the subsidiary bodies.

Mr. President, it is worth reflecting on some of the thoughtful suggestions proposed in statements last week and today. We were particularly struck by the excellent suggestion made by the Netherlands that we consider reframing how we see a programme of work. There is no reason that a schedule of activities cannot be a programme of work with ad hoc bodies established as required. It worked well this way in the past. Chile also made similar sensible comments this morning in describing a programme of work as more of a methodological tool.

Mr. President, a “comprehensive, balanced programme of work” has become something of an unattainable myth. It is common sense that balance will be needed in any programme of work that is agreed. For example, Australia's priority is to start negotiations on a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons – but others have different priorities, and compromise is needed to make progress. Brazil also made the important point this morning about avoiding cross-conditionality.

Mr. President, we were also encouraged by suggestions that the Conference can do useful work in developing documents of less than treaty status. Both China and the European Union made this useful suggestion.

However, we decide to structure our work in 2019, it is clear that the focus must be on substance. This is what the subsidiary bodies did in 2018, and it worked well. We need to continue in this vein. I also note Finland's useful suggestion of targeted questions to guide our work, and the Republic of Korea made a similar point of more focused discussions and moving away from general statements.

Everything we did last year is work we would need to do if we were in a negotiation. Building dialogue, looking for commonalities, is essential pre-negotiation work to get us ready for when actual negotiations are possible.

Mr. President, we were also pleased to hear several delegations suggest a focus on working methods and highlighting the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in

our work. Greater diversity strengthens our community and will lead to more sustainable outcomes.

Mr. President, we welcome the focus of the United States on compliance with arms-control agreements. Indeed, accountability and compliance challenges are at the heart of the difficult problems we face.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is an important part of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, so it is disturbing to note the lack of progress in addressing long-standing concerns about Russian non-compliance with its Treaty obligations. Australia encourages Russia to engage constructively with the United States and return to compliance with its obligations. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for her statement and for her kind words for the presidency. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Sweden, followed by the representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Makarowski (Sweden): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You have the full support of the Swedish delegation in your efforts to achieve a successful start to this year's session of the Conference. I would like to welcome and congratulate the new Ambassadors to the Conference, the Ambassadors from China, Ecuador and India, and offer a warm welcome to the new Secretary of the Conference, Ms. Day.

Our views on a number of current disarmament issues and priorities were expressed in the statement delivered last week on behalf of the European Union. This includes the call to preserve the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and ensure its full and verifiable implementation. The Russian Federation must urgently address the serious concerns expressed about its compliance with the Treaty in a substantial and transparent way.

In addition to the European Union statement, I would like to add, in a national capacity, some words on the work of the Conference. Mr. President, we are looking forward to your draft programme of work, which will be presented in the coming days. We trust that the draft will provide us with a foundation to begin substantive work in the Conference without delay. Over the many years of the impasse in the Conference, the notion of a "programme of work with a negotiating mandate" has been developed. As it has proved impossible to agree on a negotiating mandate for any issue, this notion has, in effect, contributed to blocking substantive work in the Conference. It became an all-or-nothing approach and the results are known.

That was the state of affairs in the Conference for most of the past two decades. Something has started to change in the last couple of years. We seem to have embarked on a way towards a pragmatic approach to advancing our work – first in the working group on the way ahead in 2017, then in last year's subsidiary bodies. Instead of only debating what we should be doing, we actually did something. We conducted some substantive work.

Mr. President, success is not currently a word frequently associated with the work of the Conference. Nonetheless, last year's work in the subsidiary bodies was, in the relative terms of the Conference, something of a success. It was not the breakthrough that would return the Conference to what it was created to do, but a step in the right direction. It proved to be a working solution, as illustrated by the adoption of the reports of the four subsidiary bodies.

As the Ambassador of the Netherlands reminded us in his statement last week, it was an approach similar to that adopted by the Conference in the 1980s and 1990s. For many years after the establishment of the Conference by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the Conference's programme of work was merely a schedule of activities that enabled discussions, often of a technical nature. We can ask ourselves whether that was a futile exercise. The subsequent adoptions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty would suggest it was not.

Until we reach an agreement in the Conference to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty – the perennial next logical step – or another international disarmament instrument, we should continue other structured and substantive work.

Mr. President, for all practical purposes, last year's decision on the subsidiary bodies was a programme of work. We could not agree to call it that, for known reasons, but that did not prevent us from carrying out substantive work. Should the presidency conclude that the continuation of the work of the subsidiary bodies, in one form or another, is the preferred solution, Sweden would support such an approach. Let us not spend time on procedural debates while waiting for the perfect solution. That would be an elusive target, easily missed. We must now show the political will to move beyond old mantras and focus on what we know works. Let us adopt a realistic and pragmatic approach and continue to work on the areas where we find commonalities that will carry us towards negotiations in a not-too-distant future. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Sweden for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria, followed by the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Tomov (Bulgaria): I thank you, Mr. President. We congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency and wish you every success in your challenging work. We also extend a warm welcome to the new representative of China, Ambassador Li Song, the new representative of India, Ambassador Sharma, and the new representative of Ecuador, Ambassador Izquierdo Miño. We also welcome the new Secretary, Ms. Radha Day.

The Republic of Bulgaria fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union last week. We would like now to make some remarks in our national capacity. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty has been crucial in upholding Euro-Atlantic security for over 30 years. Regrettably, the current situation, where only the United States abides by the Treaty, is not sustainable. The non-implementation of commitments under the Treaty by one of its States parties erodes the foundations of effective arms control and undermines our security. In this context, we share the concerns regarding the information about the development of the Russian 9M729 cruise missile.

Bulgaria was among the States present at the recent Russian briefing aimed at sharing details about the missile. The briefing failed to provide enough convincing evidence to confirm that Russia is not violating the Treaty. We hope sincerely that Russia will return to full and verifiable compliance with the Treaty. Bulgaria is firmly committed to supporting and strengthening real and verifiable arms control. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Bulgaria for his statement and for his kind words for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, esteemed colleagues, before exercising the right of reply, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Ukraine on the commencement of its presidency and wish it success in its work. It is encouraging that, in his inaugural statement, Ambassador Yuriy Klymenko included among his priorities the drawing up of the Conference's programme of work. We are prepared to support the constructive endeavours of the Ukrainian presidency.

In this context, it would not be out of place to draw attention to document CD/WP.600, presented during Russia's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2017, on combining work on nuclear disarmament with combating terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction. Given that the threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction and toxic chemicals for terrorist purposes has not disappeared, we consider that the Russian initiative regarding the drafting in the Conference on Disarmament of an international convention on combating acts of chemical and biological terrorism to be as urgent as it has ever been.

We assume that not only the delegation of Ukraine, but also the following Presidents will pay due heed to the question of the programme of work, as provided for in the Conference's rules of procedure. As experience in recent years has shown, the ability of a session to achieve results largely depends on the degree of teamwork among its six

Presidents. We therefore invite the six Presidents to cooperate closely and productively on the programme of work and other topical issues on our agenda.

Recognizing the particular role of the Presidents of the Conference in drawing up a mutually acceptable programme of work, we would like to emphasize that agreeing on a programme of work is our main collective task and it requires the participation of all delegations. We note with pleasure the businesslike mood of the Conference participants, as reflected in their statements. The time has come to back it up with concrete actions. We are convinced that the combined forces of the Conference participants will result in progress.

Of no less importance is the creation of an atmosphere of constructive cooperation resting on the principles of mutual respect, equality and the sovereign rights of delegations in accordance with the rules of procedure. We consider it inadmissible when, under pretexts that have nothing to do with matters of disarmament, members of the international community are deprived of the possibility of becoming involved in the Conference's work. We are thinking of the public wrangling over Palestine's application for observer status at the Conference. It is particularly regrettable that this could have been avoided if certain delegations had displayed diplomatic wisdom, as, for example, our Turkish colleagues did.

Many in this room expressed concern about the politicization of the Conference's activity through attempts to introduce to this forum contentious issues that were related to the competence of other institutions, but not at all to that of the Conference. We fully agree with them. Indeed, what is the point of throwing the Open Skies Agreement at the Conference when most of those present have no idea what it is all about? Or rather they are not required to, inasmuch as matters related to the Agreement are discussed and decided in Vienna. The same may be said of the Vienna Document.

With regard to the question of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, we would advise our American colleagues to have resort to The Hague, where the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has been in operation for more than 20 years. If the delegation of the United States of America has concrete proposals on how the Conference might be in a position to help the OPCW, without encroaching upon that Organisation's competence, we would be prepared to listen to them. We submitted our own proposals about the practical contribution which the Conference could make to countering terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction. And you all know who, and on what pretexts, refused to support the Russian initiative.

On the whole, we would simply urge every international forum, including the Conference, to concern itself with the issues for which it possesses the relevant terms of reference and expertise. The scope or nature of the Conference's activity is determined by its agenda, which was adopted by consensus at the first plenary session. The first two items on the agenda are linked with the subject of nuclear disarmament. For this and other reasons, only one aspect of the lengthy statement by Ambassador Robert Wood is related to the Conference. We are thinking of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). We will reply objectively, in a professional manner, without descending into loud recriminations.

May we illustrate that point with a specific example? On 23 January, the Russian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Defence held a joint briefing for the mass media and foreign military officials accredited in Moscow. After the briefing there was a demonstration of a launcher and an actual land-based 9M729 cruise missile, or SSC-8 according to the American classification. It must immediately be said that the representatives of the United States did not avail themselves of the opportunity to see with their own eyes the object giving rise to their concern. In this connection, it must be particularly emphasized that they declined to do so in advance and showed no interest whatsoever in what was going to be demonstrated and what additional information was going to be provided by Russia.

For this session of the Conference, we prepared a file of material on the INF Treaty, including for a briefing on 23 January. The material has been put on the documents table. Thus, rather than repeating everything, we will mention some key points that underscore the farfetched nature of the American accusations.

Let us begin with the fact that the 9M729 missile is an updated version of the 9M728 and both missiles were on show for ease of comparison. The changes concern the warhead, and accordingly the device yield, and the flight operations and guidance systems.

As far as the delivery vehicle, i.e. the engine and propellant, is concerned, there is no change from the previous 9M728, as could be verified visually in the course of the presentation. This is the most significant factor, insofar as the United States has not made any complaints about the 9M728. Moreover, although the body of the 9M729 is longer than the 9M728 owing to the larger warhead, its maximum range has been reduced to 480km, as was confirmed during the Zapad-2017 exercise.

For the full picture, we would point to some inconsistencies in the American assertions. Ambassador Wood's key argument is that the United States gave Russia detailed information allegedly confirming the prohibited range of the 9M729 missile.

We suggest that we look together at the data given to us by the Americans, which Ambassador Wood read out in his statement. It actually concerns information pertaining to the launcher, the missile, their producers, the coordinates of tests and firing dates. In this connection, it is necessary to clarify one important point; the designator of the missile, i.e. 9M729, was not quoted by the Americans until December 2017. Until then, the Russians did not have a clue what they were talking about. Naturally, once it became clear, we informed the United States of the existence of the missile and, at the same time, that its range was less than the prohibited limits established by the INF Treaty. In addition, by way of voluntary transparency, we gave the Americans data about the missile, although we were not obliged to do so. For the record, a detailed chronological recital of what the Americans gave us and when was contained in the briefing given by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergei Ryabkov, on 26 November 2018, i.e. before the ultimatum we were given to destroy the missile.

The question now is how is it possible to arrive at the conclusion regarding the missile's range on the basis of the information transmitted? I recall that, according to Mr. Wood's statement, we were given information about the launcher and the missile on which the briefing was held and which was made public, about their producers (tell me, how does knowing who the producers are affect the range?) and the coordinates of tests and firing dates. It was on the basis of this set of facts that our American colleagues concluded that the 9M729 missile violates the INF Treaty. If this is so, why was nothing done during the inspection of the 9M729 missile and its launcher to confirm or disprove the foundation of the claims of the United States? Where is the logic of the American position?

I would like to draw the attention of those present to one more fact. Russia declared the maximum range of the 9M729 to be 480 km, which was confirmed by the flight tests, as I mentioned earlier. The Americans, from similar hard data, say that the range is between 500 and 5,500km. You will agree that that is a substantial difference.

Data from live monitoring of tests of the 9M729 could provide definitive clarity on the basis of the United States claims. However, all our efforts to receive that information have remained unanswered. Without this, a professional dialogue is impossible. Furthermore, the Americans themselves have pulled out, making clear their lack of interest in pursuing talks.

Against the background of the official refusal of the United States to continue professional, substantive talks between interdepartmental delegations, raising the question of the INF Treaty at the Conference gives rise to nothing except bewilderment. We could understand the reasoning of our partners if their criticism of us, albeit non-constructive, was accompanied by specific suggestions as to how the Conference could help to resolve the problem of intermediate and shorter-range missiles in accordance with its mandate as a negotiating body. Simply by way of an illustration, we ourselves would suggest that we could talk about drafting a universal instrument in the field of intermediate and shorter-range missiles.

Otherwise we will regard the anti-Russian discourse of the United States as an attempt to deflect attention from urgent problems calling for joint action by participants in the Conference in order to settle them. We are thinking primarily of the consistent efforts to

draw up a programme of work for the Conference. Unfortunately, the lengthy statement of the United States delegation made no reference at all to this matter.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore our readiness to hold a serious dialogue on all the items of the Conference's agenda, including questions regarding intermediate and shorter-range missiles in the context of nuclear disarmament. Again we emphasize our determination to cooperate constructively with the Ukrainian Presidency, with the six Presidents of the 2019 session and with all delegations to achieve our common objective of getting the Conference back to substantive negotiations.

At the same time, I would like to welcome our new colleagues from India, China and Ecuador and also the Secretary of the Conference.

Esteemed colleagues, in light of the statements of some delegations, I have to make a short addition to what has been said. Over many years, specifically since 2003, the Russian delegation has repeatedly expressed concern about the actions of the United States in the context of the INF Treaty. I would advise those delegates who demand that Russia respond to American concerns to adopt a balanced approach, this being one of the principles of diplomacy, because I have never heard anyone appealing to the United States to respond to Russian concerns in such a constructive and substantive manner as we have responded to the American ones. I am talking in particular about the MK 41 universal launching system, which is used not only as an antimissile launcher but also to launch the Tomahawk intermediate-range cruise missile. I hope that colleagues will also take this into consideration. I thank you for your patience.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his kind words for the President and would now like to give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Ms. Plath (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. First, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to respond to the statement distributed by the delegation of Venezuela, as delivered by its Foreign Minister on 24 January.

The Venezuelan people are struggling under an acute political, economic and humanitarian crisis imposed on them by the Maduro regime's corruption, anti-democratic behaviour and economic mismanagement. Since 2014, more than 3 million Venezuelans have fled Venezuela, with the United Nations estimating that, should conditions remain the same, a nearly equal number could abandon the country in 2019. They are fleeing repression, hunger, crime and a lack of basic medical care and social services like electricity, hyperinflation and political repression. The Maduro regime has caused this collapse of once-prosperous Venezuela and must assume sole responsibility for this untenable situation and its uncontrollable failure.

The regime has tried to silence Venezuela's National Assembly, Venezuela's last remaining democratic institution. It has falsely declared the Assembly in contempt of the de facto Government's authority, violated the constitutional immunity of the Assembly's elective representatives through arbitrary detention and forced many parliamentarians into exile.

On 20 May 2018, the Maduro regime went to great lengths to restrict the voice of the Venezuelan people in a flawed electoral process and subsequently conducted a sham inauguration on 10 January deemed illegitimate by more than 50 countries, and that number is growing daily. The National Assembly has declared the illegitimacy of the Maduro regime and decried the usurpation of the presidency by Nicolás Maduro. On 23 January, National Assembly President Juan Guaidó assumed the role of interim President of Venezuela per article 233 of the Venezuelan Constitution. The United States recognizes Juan Guaidó as the interim President of Venezuela. In its role as the only legitimate branch of government duly elected by the Venezuelan people, the National Assembly invoked the country's Constitution to declare Nicolás Maduro illegitimate and the office of the presidency therefore vacant. The people of Venezuela have courageously spoken out against Maduro and his regime and demanded freedom and the rule of law. The United States remains committed to holding accountable those responsible for Venezuela's tragic decline and will continue to use the full suite of its diplomatic and economic tools to

support interim President Juan Guaidó, the National Assembly and the Venezuelan peoples' efforts to restore their democracy.

The United States and the international community must consider every tool available to help the Venezuelan people reclaim their country. We must use international pressure to show those within the regime that their leadership is unsustainable and that they must choose a better path forward for Venezuela.

Turning to the statement by my colleague from Iran, let me caution him against such faulty analysis of my Government's reasons for withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; instead, it was the exceptional sense of responsibility by the United States that led us to the sombre assessment of Iran's aggressive and more threatening behaviour and violations under the Plan.

With regard to my Russian colleague's incredibly weak rebuttal of Ambassador Wood's statement last week, I think that my colleagues in Brussels summed it up most succinctly on Friday when they met, as did my colleague from Bulgaria here today – you are not fooling anyone. And, as Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) said, NATO will come up with credible deterrents and defences, should Russia continue to breach the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Finally, let me say that I hear a lot about the politicization of the Conference on Disarmament. Let me be clear, whether it is Iran's support for terrorism and destabilizing regional behaviour, Syria's use of chemical weapons on its own people, the illegitimacy of the Maduro regime in Venezuela or Russia's violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the United States will use every available platform to highlight these violations and abuses of international norms. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of the United States for her statement. I recognize that Norway would like to take the floor, so my question is whether Norway would like to make a statement or exercise its right of reply.

Ms. Cervenka (Norway): A short statement.

The President: In that case, the floor is given to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Cervenka (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of your duties. Based on the many constructive proposals and ideas that we have heard presented here this week and last, we have hope that the Conference on Disarmament may take further steps forward this year.

I take the floor now to add our voice to those that have expressed their concerns about the current status of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. By prohibiting ground-based medium-range missiles, it forms an important part of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. As such, it has contributed significantly to stability in Europe for more than 30 years. As had been made clear by, among other things, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ministerial statement of 4 December, Norway and other allies stand fully behind the assessment that Russia is in breach of the Treaty, and we do believe that it is now up to Russia to preserve the Treaty. National treaties cannot be upheld over time if only one party complies. No one stands to gain from an arms race in Europe. Ground-based, medium range missiles undermine strategic stability, and their reintroduction diminishes security for all.

Finally, I would also like to express our hope that the United States and Russia will work towards renewing the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty when it expires. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Norway for her statement and would now like to give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom, who requested the floor.

Mr. Cleobury (United Kingdom): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Like my Norwegian colleague, I first take the floor to set out the United Kingdom's position on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, given that it has been mentioned by several delegations both last week and this week.

Mr. President, the Treaty has played an important role in supporting Euro-Atlantic security. We want to see the Treaty continue to stand, but for that to happen there must be full and verified compliance by all parties. Russia is violating the Treaty and has been for some time. We recognize the exhaustive efforts made by the United States over a number of years to press Russia to return to compliance and have consistently supported its diplomatic efforts to that end. We therefore strongly support the finding of the United States that Russia is in material breach of the Treaty. Russia has developed and deployed Treaty-violating missiles. The briefing on 23 January and the statement that we just heard from the distinguished representative of Russia do nothing to change that conclusion. Russia has a final chance to demonstrate its return to full and verified compliance and respect its Treaty obligations. Russia has not yet offered a credible response to our shared concerns, only denials and obfuscation.

A situation in which the United States is respecting its Treaty obligations and Russia is not, is not sustainable. Russia's pursuit of Treaty-violating missile capabilities has put European security at risk. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Venezuela

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): As you know, distinguished representatives of the countries of the world here at this Conference on Disarmament, I was the first to take the floor this morning and, of course, respectful as we are of the nature of this forum, our intervention centred precisely on the work we must do to revive the Conference and meet our obligations.

I did not bring the topic of Venezuela to the table out of respect for you and for the nature of the agenda, which is why I am not prepared for this intervention, but I will improvise. I was astounded, as I am sure you were, to hear the delegation of the United States address an issue that is on the international agenda because the Trump Administration is preparing a military invasion of Venezuela.

The United States Government has never accepted the fact that there is a sovereign Government in Venezuela – one that defends with absolute determination the sovereignty of our country. This has been the case from the moment President Hugo Chávez assumed the role of Head of State and announced to the world that Venezuela would embark on the road towards self-determination, diversify its international relations and pursue multipolar policies; in other words, that Venezuela would cease to be subjected to United States neocolonialism. We flew the banner of Latin American and Caribbean unity along this road and Chávez, together with other leaders of the continent, helped forge a new regional architecture. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Union of South American Nations, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and Petrocaribe, a Venezuelan oil company that aims to promote solidarity with our brothers in the Caribbean, were created. Of course, these policies were never accepted by the Government of the United States, which is why, barely two years after President Hugo Chávez Frías took office, the United States Government supported and sponsored a coup d'état and imposed a puppet, who fortunately lasted barely 48 hours in power. Nonetheless, no sooner had this dictator been installed through a terrorist military coup than the United States Government sent its ambassador to Miraflores Palace to offer support, just as they had backed the entire coup conspiracy – a coup by the military and corporate elite. Luckily, the military youth and the people of Venezuela rose up, national flag in hand, invoking the Constitution, and President Chávez was restored to power. That was, as I said, 48 hours later, but the United States Government already had a plane on Isla de Margarita ready to kidnap President Hugo Chávez Frías, while those involved in the coup, the dictators, had ordered his assassination.

I was, at that time, Venezuelan Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS). The dictator called the OAS Secretary General, César Gaviria, to inform him that he was relieving Ambassador Jorge Valero of his duties and appointing the deputy. In other words, the dictator, Carmona Estanga, was following an order given to him by the State Department to call Gaviria and tell him to refuse to recognize the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Venezuela. When I say that the order was given by the State

Department – and forgive me as I go into detail – it is because the State Department had sent a communication to the dictator, Pedro Carmona Estanga, telling him that, as reflected in a letter that was recovered when the dictator fled Miraflores Palace. The letter was from the Chargé d'affaires at the United States Embassy. In the letter from the State Department, from one Mr. Chipola as I recall, of the department for the Andes, the State Department told the dictator, first, to say whether it was true that President Chávez had resigned, because they had made up a story that Chávez had stood down. In fact, Chávez had never relinquished power; he had been detained and imprisoned against his will.

Second, the State Department advised the dictator Pedro Carmona Estanga to keep up appearances. Remember that there is an Inter-American Democratic Charter, which states that the United States Government does not recognize dictatorships or military coups. Keep up appearances meant uphold the pretence of constitutionality.

The third piece of advice from the State Department to the dictator was to fire Ambassador Jorge Valero immediately. Thus, the dictator, on the instructions of Mr. Otto Reich of the State Department, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for the Americas, carried out the order. This is similar to what they want to do now, except what they want to do now is far more shameful, far more primitive and far more archaic. They want to take the world back to the Middle Ages, when monarchs crowned themselves.

In the coup of April 2002, when the United States Government imposed the dictator Carmona Estanga through a military coup, the dictator Pedro Carmona Estanga swore himself in at Miraflores Palace, the symbol of power. President Chávez was arrested and imprisoned by the dictators, and Pedro Carmona Estanga swore himself in at Miraflores Palace, in the presence of the opposition parties. Most of the opposition parties were there, together with the Church hierarchy and the top brass of the business world. It was a charade; they wanted to make it appear as though it was a democratic transition. It was a horrendous dictatorship in Venezuela and was immediately toppled.

Please forgive me, Mr. President, delegates, for speaking with such passion, but I cannot help but defend my country with passion, determination and absolute loyalty to my homeland, to Bolívar and to the dreams of the liberators who always defended the heritage of my country and that of other countries with such energy and enthusiasm.

What is it that the United States wants? What does that Administration want? Does that Government, the United States Government, which flouts environmental agreements, rejects agreements on Iran signed by several European countries, starts trade wars against China, threatens Russia with nuclear war, sadistically and indiscriminately attacks Central American migrants who go there, is building an illegal wall and kidnaps children to make them suffer for having migrant parents, does that Government have the moral authority to impose a dictator on Venezuela? The supposed transitional president swore himself in, but did not even keep up appearances like the dictator Pedro Carmona Estanga did in 2002. He swore himself in on the street in front of a group of people, saying, “I am the President of Venezuela”.

And the Trump Administration recognized him immediately, or a few seconds or minutes later. What a disgrace! What an insult! What absolute disrespect for the Constitution of Venezuela, which states that the President of the Republic is elected by popular vote! In Venezuela, there is no other way of electing presidents or authorities at any level than by universal, direct and secret ballot. That was how President Chávez was repeatedly elected and that is how President Maduro has been repeatedly elected. More than 6 million people voted for President Maduro and more than 67 per cent of Venezuelans supported him.

Now, the warmongering, racist, pro-terrorist Trump Administration wants to impose a dictatorship on Venezuela. Venezuela does not accept dictators imposed by the State Department. Venezuela accepts only legitimate presidents. I respectfully call on all countries present at this forum, and, thankfully, most countries around the world support Venezuelan democracy and have categorically rejected this new dictatorial attempt, this new international disgrace.

Most countries supported Venezuela in the Security Council debate last Saturday. Of the speeches given, 19 were in favour of Venezuela. I remember, to name but a few, China, Russia, South Africa and the Ambassador of Barbados, speaking on behalf of the 12 Caribbean Community countries, all calling in unison for sovereignty and the sacrosanct principles of international law to be respected. Unfortunately, the racist and genocidal Trump Administration intends to start a war in Venezuela. Mr. Trump has said on numerous occasions, and I will say it here because it is no secret, a few months ago he met with his Cabinet, which included John Kelly, the former leader of the United States Southern Command, and, as reported in *The New York Times* and *The Journal*, he asked them why they had not invaded Venezuela, if it was so close; if their powerful army could reach Africa or Asia, thousands of kilometres away, it could have invaded Venezuela. Again, this was reported in *The New York Times*. He went on to say that they were ready for anything and that all options were on the table. John Kelly was recently removed from the Cabinet, but five years ago, when he was General and leader of the Southern Command, they began fabricating a supposed humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. The recent migration patterns that started two years ago precisely coincided with the adoption of illegal unilateral coercive measures, which prohibit us from buying medicines and conducting international transactions. Today, the United States Department of the Treasury said that they would steal 1.7 billion Venezuelan dollars held there.

The President: Ambassador, sorry for reminding you, but it is 1 p.m., so I would like to remind you that there are six more requests for the floor. We now have to decide how we shall proceed.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you for reminding me, but I am sure you all understand that I had no other choice but to respond to the unfounded, outrageous and disrespectful intervention that was made, while respecting the rules and all of you here.

I would like to finish by calling on all countries of the world to reject war, to reject the military invasion of Venezuela by the United States and to uphold peace. I would also like to conclude by saying that, fortunately, voices have been raised calling for peace. Pope Francis himself said that the one thing there has been in Venezuela is peace and that he opposed violence, war and killing among Venezuelans.

The Presidents of Uruguay and Mexico, along with all Central American, Caribbean and, as I understand it, some European States, are offering to help foster a dialogue between the Government and the opposition. Political and ideological differences are resolved through dialogue, not through war or terrorism. This is why President Maduro has welcomed the invitation extended by the Pope, the Presidents of Mexico and Uruguay, and Heads of State in Central America, the Caribbean and around the world. There have been numerous, if not hundreds, of statements by world leaders calling for the sovereignty and self-determination of Venezuela to be respected. I would like to finish by expressing my gratitude for the displays of solidarity with Venezuelan democracy that President Nicolás Maduro has received at this crucial moment in history.

Thank you very much, Mr. President, and I apologize to all of you for having exceeded my time in this forum.

The President: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, as I mentioned, we have six more requests for the floor. The interpreters are available for another seven minutes at most and then stop providing services. Shall I postpone proceedings until the afternoon or continue in English only? The Ambassador of Germany has requested the floor.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President, I would suggest that we break for lunch now, because I suspect some colleagues will have lunch engagements, and resume our plenary meeting this afternoon at 3 p.m. Thank you.

The President: As the President, I thank the Ambassador of Germany for this suggestion. I think it would be quite acceptable. I see now that Cuba requested the floor.

Mr. Delgado (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I would first like to ask whether you have decided to resume this meeting at 3 p.m.

The President: Yes, the proposal was to reconvene at 3 p.m. this afternoon. Are there any objections to this proposal? I recognize the representative of China.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): Thank you, Mr. President. I had wanted to say something earlier, but since the other delegates said enough I withdraw my request to speak. At this stage, I do not think it is worth having another session this afternoon. The quarrels have already been fought and to extend them to continue the critical exercise in the chamber is meaningless, so I will not agree to having another session this afternoon at 3 p.m.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to inform the chamber and the President that next Tuesday is the first day of the Chinese New Year, and we hope that the meeting arrangements for next week could be humanitarian enough for the Chinese delegates to have a happy holiday with their family members. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his suggestions and for reminding us about the upcoming Chinese New Year. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic): Thank you, Mr. President. I join the previous speaker in expressing my delegation's difficulty with interrupting the discussion right now and resuming at 3 p.m. I think it would be more practical if we continued and exhausted the list of speakers. My delegation is in a position to exceptionally accept that we continue in English, and I am ready to deliver my right of reply in English once you decide to give me the floor. Thank you.

The President: I thank you for these comments and recognize the representative of France, who has requested the floor.

Mr. Weisz (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. I will continue in French as I believe that the interpreters are still here. It is not possible for us to continue in English only, the rules of procedure are clear and many delegations have reiterated the importance of respecting the rules of procedure. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his comments and give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. In the light of the statements made by some of my colleagues regarding the decision not to extend this political exercise, I have opted to take the floor and take advantage of my colleagues' time, as we were not the ones who started this political circus that we are seeing here today. The circus did not start today, however; it began at the first plenary meeting of this Conference on Disarmament, when we heard delegations object to one State's participation in this august Conference. Since then we have been hearing extensive political discourse that would seem to have been taken from the cold war, with the specific intention of shifting the blame. If the psychologist Sigmund Freud were here, he would no doubt take it as a classic example of projection.

We are dismayed at the attempts made at this august Conference to politicize matters unrelated to disarmament through an aggressive and interventionist discourse. Today, with the classic arrogance of the incompetent, we have written a new chapter in the politicization process, in clear violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Cuba strongly opposes and condemns any attempt to mount a coup and impose a puppet government in the service of the United States in the Republic of Venezuela or in any other country, as to do so would be a flagrant violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We should rid ourselves of these false pretences and this hypocrisy. The true intentions behind the action against Venezuela are to control the vast resources of our fellow nation and to destroy the example it sets for the emancipation and defence of the dignity and independence of our America. In response to these actions, we wish to let the United States Government and all its allies and puppets know that Cuba will always be on the side of international law, just causes and the people of Venezuela.

Thank you very much, Mr. President, and please accept my apologies if I have exceeded my time.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba. Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor? Now I recognize the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The floor is yours.

Mr. Pang Kwang-hyok (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation strongly opposes any attempt to raise the domestic issues of individual countries in this forum, as they have no relevance to our deliberations and the Conference of Disarmament agenda and have the nature of interference in internal affairs. In this vein, I share the opinion of my colleague from the Republic of China – that if we were to opt to continue this politically controversial exercise this afternoon, it would be useless and meaningless. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and would like to remind you that the interpreters will leave us soon and that there are still more than three delegations insisting on taking the floor. I would like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have asked for the floor to respond to the statement made by the representative of the United States this afternoon. In view of the late hour, I shall refrain from issuing a substantive response to the ridiculous allegations levelled repeatedly by the United States concerning the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We have stated our position and presented our responses to these allegations clearly in our official statements at formal meetings of the Conference and in official documents.

With regard to Venezuela, my Government issued a statement on 24 January condemning in the strongest terms the persistent and blatant interference by the United States Administration in the affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Such acts constitute a flagrant violation of all international legal norms, a brazen attack on a sovereign State and a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. But my question, Mr. President, to the representative of the United States is as follows: under which agenda item of the Conference can we place the charges flung from left to right against Syria, Venezuela, Iran and Russia? Some of the allegations do not even belong in this meeting room but in other forums. An issue relating to the internal affairs of a member State was also raised in a manner that violates the Charter of the United Nations.

After listening to the statements by the United States last week and today, I find that the issue is no longer confined to politicization of our agenda in order to avoid addressing key issues of relevance to the work of the Conference. What we are seeing is an attempt by the Trump Administration to undermine the Conference, the foundations on which it is based and the prospects for its future work. This is a matter of particular significance when it comes from a member who is mandated to assume the presidency of the Conference within a few weeks. The member is supposed to work towards achieving a consensus. There can be no doubt that the language used by the United States in this meeting room is not progressing in the right direction. Thank you.

The President: Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to remind you that there is no consensus in this chamber with regard to whether we proceed without interpretation or whether we will reconvene at 3 p.m. We did not reach a consensus – some delegations would like to have the break, and others would like to continue. Is there any other opportunity if the delegations do not wish to have a plenary meeting this afternoon? We can do it tomorrow. I understand that Iran has a point of order.

Mr. Azarsa (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. My flag has been up for three minutes, but you did not see it. I want just to exercise a very short right of reply – I am ready to do so very briefly.

The President: Please be brief.

Mr. Azarsa (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I want just to remind my colleague from the United States that Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) is

clear enough for everybody in the room and for the international community about which country is on the side of aggression, is clearly breaching the Security Council resolution and is selling military equipment to numerous countries in the world. I want just to repeat again that politicizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament is not the way out, and it is very unfortunate to see the United States Administration, with destructive unilateralism in its DNA, abuse a multilateral forum to attack multilateralism. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I see two more raised flags, so I would suggest continuing briefly. I would like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Herráiz España (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I will be very brief as the interpreters are being extraordinarily generous. I would simply like to echo the –

(*spoke in English*)

In fact, I thought we still enjoyed the extraordinary generosity of the interpreters, but we no longer do. I wanted only to say that we really should respect our procedures and practices in the Conference on Disarmament plenary meetings, interpretation must be provided and this is a very irregular way to proceed. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Spain. I fully agree that the rules of procedure have to be respected by all the delegations. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of China, if you can be brief, please.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): Thank you, Mr. President, for your generosity and the indulgence. I will be very brief – three sentences. China is concerned with the exacerbating trend of politicization of the work of the Conference on Disarmament and, taking this opportunity, I would like to emphasize that China maintains that all countries should abide by the Charter of the United Nations, especially the norms governing international relations and the principles of international law, such as non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and no threat of force. Venezuelan affairs must be and can only be chosen and decided by the Venezuelan people. China is firmly opposed to foreign interference in Venezuela's affairs, in particular the threat of military interference. To repeat what has been happening for many years in the Middle East serves the interests of nobody. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of China. Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor? I think this is not the case, so this concludes our business for today. I wish to inform all delegations that today the secretariat will circulate a draft programme of work on my behalf. I see a point of order from the Netherlands.

Ms. Claringbould (Netherlands): I am sorry, Ambassador, for raising my flag, but I do still have a statement – I was put on the speakers' list, I believe – that I do intend to make at the earliest opportunity, although we were flexible about when and how that will be arranged. It does not mean that we were not on the list. I do not think I am the only country, so I hope we can reconvene today to finish today's list. Thank you.

The President: I apologize and thank you for reminding us, so my suggestion would be to reconvene at 3 p.m., since some delegations would like to continue. I recognize the representative of China.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): Thank you, Mr. President. Since only our colleague from the Netherlands is requesting the floor, I think we can wait and give her the chance to make the statement instead of reconvening, because I have many other meetings, including that of the United Nations Internet Governance Forum. I would love to come back, but I also have to go to the other meetings. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I understand, but I see the point of order raised by France.

Mr. Weisz (France): I will be quick. Thank you, Mr. President. I will be very happy to hear the statement by the Netherlands this afternoon at 3 p.m. with interpretation. We have rules of procedure and we should abide by them. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the representative of France and would now like to give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Ms. Plath (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. I agree with Mr. Ji Haojun. I think that if it is possible, we should take the speakers' list into another session – not this afternoon necessarily – but next week, or later this week, when we are going to use the full three hours, because in my experience we pay for interpretation for a block of time. If we meet for an hour, we are still paying; it is fiscally irresponsible to meet for 15 minutes or half an hour and pay for a three-hour block of interpretation that we will not fully utilize. It makes more sense in my mind, fiscally and otherwise, and taking into consideration everyone's time, to schedule another session later in the week or next week, when we will make full use of the time and the interpreters' time.

The President: In this regard, I would like to mention that interpretation will be available this afternoon.

Ms. Plath (United States of America): Yes, sir, I am sorry to interrupt, but if we meet and only meet for one hour, we still pay as member States for a full three-hour slot, as Mr. Deyneko knows, and I do not find that to be a good use of resources when we can fully utilize three hours next week when we meet again or later this week.

The President: I understand the point and thank the representative of the United States. I see the flag raised by the representative of the Russian Federation. The floor is yours.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation): Thank you, Mr. President. In this particular case, I tend to agree with the representative of the United States, and I have a question for you, because a little earlier you announced that the secretariat would distribute the initial programme of work you prepared. In this case, I believe everybody will be interested in knowing when you are going to do that, and maybe we can combine those two.

The President: I already tried to inform you about my plans for this week. I would like to introduce this draft programme of work at the next plenary meeting and to assure all delegations that I intend to provide time to all States and regional groups to give me their comments on this draft, whether in this setting, formally or informally, as well as bilaterally, and that I will do my utmost to listen to all suggestions and incorporate them in the text as best as I can.

Having said that, I am planning to hold the first plenary meeting on this draft programme of work on Thursday, 31 January 2019, at 2.30 p.m. to limit the time conflicts with High Representative Nakamitsu's executive briefing at 4 p.m. on the same day. It is my intention to start the meeting as a formal plenary meeting at which I would like to present the proposed draft programme of work and then move to an informal plenary meeting to give delegations the opportunity to provide any preliminary feedback informally. Formal discussions on the draft would then continue in formal plenary next week. That is my plan, so if there are no objections we can start our plenary meeting at 2.30 p.m. on Thursday with the remaining requests to take the floor from today. I understand that the representative of China would like the floor.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): Thank you, Mr. President, I just want to echo what has been said by our United States and Russian colleagues and express my support for your plan.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his flexibility, and if there are no other requests for the floor, we will meet on Thursday at 2.30 p.m. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.