

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and eighty-fourth plenary meeting


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President: Mr. Aidan Liddle..... (United Kingdom)

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The President: I call to order the 1484th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, we begin this morning the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. This morning, we have five speakers on our list and there are eight more this afternoon, including the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres.

Allow me, at this stage, to suspend the meeting for a moment to welcome our first distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to extend a warm welcome to our first distinguished guest of the day, Mr. Ashikbayev. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Ashikbayev (Kazakhstan): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, it is a great honour for me to open the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament on its fortieth anniversary. First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Conference. I am convinced that your experience and skilful leadership will contribute to overcoming the many years of stagnation in the work of the Conference on Disarmament and to beginning substantive negotiations. The delegation of Kazakhstan expresses its full support and readiness to assist you in your duties as President of the Conference. I would also like to commend the efforts of the previous President of the Conference, Ambassador Klymenko of Ukraine, on finding viable options for the programme of work of the Conference. The key to finding consensus on critical issues lies in our ability to demonstrate political will, to compromise and to find common ground. I am convinced that the politicization of discussion does not bring any practical value to resolving issues; confidence-building is a key factor and fundamental element of any negotiating process.

The call for dialogue is the main pillar of the “Manifesto – The World: The Twenty-first Century” proposed by President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. The Manifesto envisions a world based upon unity and cooperation, not division and rivalry. In the same spirit of dialogue, President Nazarbayev, in his role as President of the United Nations Security Council, convened a high-level dialogue last January, with the focus on non-proliferation and confidence-building.

This year is quite symbolic for Kazakhstan: exactly thirty years ago, the Nevada Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement was founded at the initiative of civil society groups of Kazakhstan. On 29 August 1991, the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site was shut down pursuant to a historic decree issued by President Nazarbayev. Soon after that came the international moratorium on nuclear testing in various polygons across the globe, which subsequently spurred the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996. It was the first time in world history that a nuclear test site was closed by the will of the people, and the fourth largest nuclear arsenal was renounced. Some thirty years later, it has become obvious that the global anti-nuclear movement needs to be revitalized and nuclear disarmament needs a second breath.

The Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/57 at its seventieth session, may constitute such a basis. We are grateful to all Member States that supported our initiative and remain determined to continue our work towards universalization of this resolution.

Mr. President, another historic milestone is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession of Kazakhstan to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear-weapon State. We have fulfilled our obligations with the greatest degree of responsibility. In less than a year, the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference will take place and we simply do not have the right to let another review conference become a failure. The situation around the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (the INF Treaty) is a global concern that jeopardizes the whole international security and nuclear disarmament architecture. It is hard to overestimate the unique historical role of the INF Treaty; its denunciation could provoke a new arms race in different parts of the world and pose a

direct threat to global peace and security. As one of the parties to the INF Treaty, the Republic of Kazakhstan calls on all States to jointly counter the dangerous tendencies and take measures to save the Treaty.

The need for an early start on simultaneous negotiations on all four key agenda items of the Conference on Disarmament is widely accepted and supported. The Conference must respond adequately to the new challenges which can, and should, be discussed within these walls. For Kazakhstan, nuclear disarmament is one of the most pressing issues on the contemporary agenda. Over the past decades, United Nations Member States have not been able to develop any multilateral document on nuclear disarmament. Moreover, bilateral nuclear reduction agreements have been put at risk as well.

The lack of progress on article VI obligations by nuclear-weapon States in recent decades resulted in the decision by more than 120 nations to develop the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This is a reality we cannot ignore. The Treaty fully corresponds to the vision of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world by 2045 set out by the President of Kazakhstan.

Overall, the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament may offer practical steps and solutions in the nuclear disarmament domain. Kazakhstan stands firmly for the earliest possible entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We call upon all eight remaining annex 2 States to finalize the necessary procedures for signing and ratifying the Treaty. We must also maintain the efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space. The development of a legally binding instrument prohibiting the deployment of arms in outer space remains a key collective task. The joint initiative on the prevention of an arms race in outer space pursued by Russia and China deserves the support of all States.

In the realities of the twenty-first century, reliance on nuclear deterrence can no longer be the bedrock of national security. In this regard, the start of negotiations on a treaty on negative security assurances is crucial to sustaining nuclear disarmament, reducing the relevance of the "nuclear umbrella" concept and building confidence. Kazakhstan advocates for an early start of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. My Government made a practical contribution to this process by hosting a regional workshop on the subject in September 2018, which was jointly organized with the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and supported financially by the European Union.

Mr. President, this year marks the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. We look forward to the early completion of the ratification process of the protocol on negative assurances to the Treaty of Semipalatinsk by the United States. Within the framework of our anti-nuclear initiatives, we will contribute to expanding the nuclear-weapon-free world. In this regard, Kazakhstan advocates for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Currently, we are promoting an initiative to create a permanent mechanism of cooperation and coordination between all existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, and we plan to hold a meeting of representatives of all zones in Astana later this year. We would welcome all interested parties to take an active part in this process.

Since its independence, Kazakhstan has demonstrated its hopes for disarmament and its firm commitment to the principle of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The realities of today are such that many conflicts can be prevented and effectively solved only if there is mutual understanding and mutual trust between the nuclear Powers. Finding compromise-based solutions has never been easy; it requires political will for action, understanding and willingness to work together.

The President: I thank Mr. Ashikbayev for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort him from the Chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like now to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, Mr. Tariq Ahmad, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office of the United Kingdom. Thank you, Sir, for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor.

Mr. Ahmad (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. This year, 2019, marks a century of disarmament negotiations in Geneva and the fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament. Today's arms control framework is one of the greatest achievements of the rules-based system. We built this framework together because we all understood the threat that uncontrolled arms proliferation posed to our security, be it individually or, indeed, collectively. Even States with the most powerful militaries recognize the value of collective rules-based restraint to their national security interests.

Today, that framework of agreed rules is under threat, including from States that willingly agreed to it but now, sadly, wilfully ignore it. In this gloomy context, the latest planned summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un is positive news and we therefore urge North Korea to negotiate in good faith to honour its commitments to denuclearize and to agree on the next steps.

For almost a century, the use of chemical weapons was taboo. But in recent years they have been deployed with devastating effects, as we all witnessed, be it in Syria, in Iraq, in Malaysia and tragically, yes, in the United Kingdom as well. The international community has been resolute in its response. States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention have enabled the technical secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to attribute responsibility for chemical weapon attacks in Syria. The European Union has adopted a new sanctions regime targeting those responsible for the use and proliferation of these abhorrent weapons. And in response to the Salisbury attack in the United Kingdom, it has been proposed that two new families of novichok agents be added to the schedules of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It is right that we strengthen all our conventions and instruments to ensure that they remain effective and indeed relevant in the face of new threats. The Conference on Disarmament is a unique forum. It is the world's single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. If progress is slow, it is not the fault of the institution itself; it is because the issues at stake are both complex and sensitive. Nonetheless, we must recognize that the Conference has been blocked for far too long. The proposal by the United Kingdom to establish subsidiary bodies is intended to deepen our understanding and prepare the ground for eventual negotiating mandates that could form the basis of a programme of work in the near future. The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement of the European Union on a fissile material cut-off treaty. And as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United Kingdom remains committed to the step-by-step approach to multilateral disarmament which has led to huge reductions over the past decades.

The United Kingdom will continue to call for universal membership of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Verification is essential if arms control measures are to be effective and if they are to inspire confidence. The United Kingdom has played a leading role in developing verification tools with both nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. We look forward to an ambitious report from the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts in April and urge all States to support this vital work.

We also need urgently to develop a framework for behaviour in outer space. As our dependence on satellite technology grows, so too do the potential consequences of errors or misunderstandings in space. I would stress that we cannot rely on existing physical methods of regulation. We urgently need to build trust between spacefaring nations and increase understanding of behavioural norms. I look forward to the conclusions of the second session of the Group of Governmental Experts on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We also need to do more to make the most of the remaining two years of the Biological Weapons Convention intersessional programme. Among other things, this means that States parties must pay their arrears. As we approach the review conference in 2021, we can use the meetings of experts to develop common understanding and indeed promote effective action.

To conclude, let me assure you all that the United Kingdom remains committed to multilateral disarmament. Under our presidency, our delegation will work tirelessly with all of you to make progress on all these important issues.

The President: I thank Mr. Ahmad for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort him from the Chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, Her Excellency Ms. Kang Kyung-wha, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. Thank you, Madam, for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor.

Ms. Kang Kyung-wha (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, I am indeed delighted to be back at the Conference on Disarmament as this august body celebrates its fortieth anniversary. Forty years ago, during the dark days of the cold war, amid a desperate need to curb the escalating arms race and the rising nuclear stockpile, the first special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament was convened in 1978. The Conference on Disarmament was thus born and, since then, the Conference on Disarmament has made vital contributions to international peace and security by producing milestone disarmament instruments such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. However, for the past two decades, the Conference on Disarmament has been in deep slumber, even as the world gradually slid into an increasingly complex and volatile security environment. Moreover, military spending has reached its highest peak since the end of the cold war, while several disarmament bodies in Geneva are suffering from budgetary difficulties. Long-enshrined norms, such as the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, have been repeatedly violated.

The expansion of human activities into outer space and cyberspace, combined with the rapid evolution of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons and digital interference capabilities, has further complicated the international security landscape. And the world watches closely as the fate of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and its potential impact on the whole disarmament architecture unfolds. And yet, we are seeing an erosion of consensus within the global disarmament community. The loss of consensus on numerous United Nations General Assembly resolutions last year is a testimony to the growing “schism” among countries.

At such a time, more so than ever, the Conference on Disarmament, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, must leverage its institutional memory and face up to this new reality. In this regard, I would like to commend the work of the subsidiary bodies and the substantive work they did last year while we continued our efforts to agree on a programme of work. We must keep up the momentum and shore up the relevance of the Conference on Disarmament, for which a more realistic, flexible and practical approach is needed. I welcome the efforts of the United Kingdom presidency to this end. It would also be useful to consider and discuss expanding the membership of the Conference and improving the efficiency of the current working methods.

The Conference on Disarmament should go further and contribute to the 2020 Review Conference. We can ill afford another failure, but concerns are already high that we are yet to see tangible progress towards ensuring the success of the upcoming review conference. In this context, my Government finds the fissile material cut-off treaty an issue to which the Conference on Disarmament could make a substantial and immediate contribution, on the basis of the work of the high-level expert preparatory group. Also, as the Conference on Disarmament continues its discussions on various issues, I hope it will be mindful of the implications of disarmament for the Sustainable Development Goals, as laid out in the Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament. My Government will support his efforts in any way we can, including through the annual Republic of Korea–United Nations Joint Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues.

Mr. President, during the past year, the developments on the Korean Peninsula have been distinctively positive news for the global security community. An epicentre of global

instability for many decades, the Korean Peninsula has changed course and become a source of hope. If my remark on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea last year at the Conference on Disarmament expressed cautious hope, this year, I am glad to say, I bring a message of progress and expectation. The three inter-Korean summits and the first-ever United States–Democratic People's Republic of Korea summit last year brought about a historic shift on the Korean Peninsula from a long entrenched paradigm of confrontation and hostility to one of peace and dialogue. Through these historical engagements, the top leaders of the two Koreas and the United States have agreed to work together to realize a nuclear-free and peaceful Korean Peninsula. The agreements have been followed up with confidence-building measures such as the return of the remains of missing-in-action combatants to the United States from North Korea. And the two sides have continued the engagement at both high and working levels.

A military agreement between South and North Korea to reduce tension and eliminate the chances of accidental clashes has been implemented, for example, by tearing down several guard posts on the two sides of the military demarcation line, designating no-fly zones and disarming the Joint Security Area around Panmunjom. Inter-Korean dialogue has become active in other areas as well, and North Korea has repeatedly committed to complete denuclearization and indicated its readiness to dismantle key parts of its nuclear and missiles programme in return for corresponding measures to guarantee its security.

In just two days from now, the second United States–Democratic People's Republic of Korea summit will take place in Hanoi. We expect it to be another important milestone in our efforts to achieve complete denuclearization and establish permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. We look forward to tangible and substantial results coming out of this meeting. In the meantime, my Government has been fully implementing the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and will continue to do so until we are assured that we are firmly and irrevocably on our way towards complete denuclearization. And in pursuing inter-Korean cooperation, we are doing so in faithful adherence to the Security Council sanctions.

Mr. President, faced with the dark realities of his time, Martin Luther King once said, “We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope”. I find this remark to be very relevant to both the Conference on Disarmament and the Korean Peninsula. The Conference on Disarmament has been a disappointment for a long time, and the worsening geostrategic environment signals more turbulence ahead. But the Conference on Disarmament was born amid even grimmer realities and has pushed on through troubling times. We must not lose hope of finding a way to restore its credibility. If a major breakthrough is out of reach for now, we should continue to lay down small stepping stones such as furthering the work of the subsidiary bodies.

As for the Republic of Korea, against many odds and disappointments, we opened a new road to peace through convention-defying leadership and vision. We are determined to stay the course until we achieve complete denuclearization and establish permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. And we will build on these efforts to continue to work with the international community to reinvigorate the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank Ms. Kang Kyung-wha for her statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort her from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like now to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey. Thank you, Sir, for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. The floor is yours.

Mr. Çavuşoğlu (Turkey): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Distinguished delegates, it is a privilege to address you today; thank you very much for the kind invitation.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are critical enablers of global safety, security and peace. They are of even greater value during times of instability and uncertainty. In her part of the world, Turkey is directly confronted by a multitude of risks and threats. We are fighting various terrorist organizations at the same time, from Daesh to the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Democratic Union Party, the People's Protection

Units and the Fethullah Terrorist Organization, while the conflict in Syria is almost in its ninth year.

The Conference on Disarmament was established forty years ago, when global security was also faced with many challenges. It is a unique platform, especially in addressing matters related to weapons of mass destruction. Leading multilateral arrangements on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons were all negotiated in this body. This is an important legacy. These agreements may not make headlines today, but, in reality, they are the cornerstones of international peace and security. Steps to undermine them will not benefit anyone. We cannot afford to abandon multilateralism.

There is great polarization in disarmament forums today. Traditional confidence-building and transparency measures are no longer functioning as planned. Meanwhile, advances in science and technology have increased the challenge and associated risks. This is a problem to which we cannot turn a blind eye today.

Mr. President, achievement of the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons depends first and foremost on the successful and universal implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. All of our joint commitments on that matter, including on convening an international conference for a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, should be met as soon as possible.

The three pillars of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are equally critical and should be addressed in a balanced manner. States that are in full compliance with their international obligations have the right to utilize, of course, the benefits of nuclear energy. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is crucial for global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts, and we once again call for its urgent ratification and implementation by all relevant partners.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, it is our common responsibility to make use of this platform, which is a very important platform. We will need to be more flexible in a spirit of mutual ownership and collective responsibility, and we need to start by agreeing on a programme of work.

Turkey is also ready to work on a non-discriminatory and verifiable treaty to ban the production of fissile material. Such a treaty should take into account the legitimate security concerns of all Conference on Disarmament members.

As the sixth and last president of the Conference last year, Turkey worked hard to prepare a mutually acceptable substantive report. However, non-substantive issues did not allow us to capitalize on the achievements of last year. With that experience in mind, we urge all Conference on Disarmament members to contribute to this platform through constructive engagement. Our priority should be to make this platform in its current composition functional and efficient again. And that is the spirit in which Turkey will continue to approach this body.

The President: I thank Mr. Çavuşoğlu for his statement. Allow me to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort him from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: I would like to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Andrei Dapkiunas, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus. Thank you, Sir, for addressing the Conference. You have the floor.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, as you know, the breakdown of the contemporary disarmament and non-proliferation system is continuing. Two key parties intend to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in the near future. It was this instrument that laid the foundation for practical steps in the field of nuclear disarmament and made an invaluable contribution to reducing tensions on the European continent and around the world. The fate of other nuclear disarmament agreements is also hanging in the balance. The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has been impossible for more than twenty years. Statements of practical intent to deploy weapons systems in outer space are a cause of increasing concern. New challenges and threats require assessment and a timely response.

All of this, in our view, points clearly to a global security crisis. We have an effective means of overcoming it – namely, urgent, comprehensive and balanced multilateral negotiations to smooth over differences. We believe that the Conference on Disarmament, with its mandate and scope, should play a key role in this process.

In the circumstances, the Conference should actively engage in efforts to prevent the use of new advances in science and technology for destructive purposes. Synthetic biology, cyberthreats, the use of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems and the risk of the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and related materials and technologies by non-State actors are far from the only threats that have been pointed out by dozens of experts in this chamber.

The outcome of the work of subsidiary body 5 – which was coordinated by Belarus – in the Conference's 2018 session clearly shows that, with rapid scientific and technological progress and the development of new technologies, these issues are becoming cross-cutting and touch on all aspects of disarmament and non-proliferation. We are therefore of the view that the time has come to end the practice of dividing the issues on the Conference agenda into core and other issues. The new challenges considered under agenda items 5, 6 and 7 should, in our view, be considered on an equal footing with nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

The preventive measures that the Conference can take in response to these threats will be a major contribution to non-proliferation and international security. Belarus is ready to propose to the Conference a number of practical steps to prevent the malicious use of new advances in science and technology.

First, we invite the Conference to request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to prepare a comprehensive report on the risks and challenges that new technologies pose to international security and non-proliferation. We believe that this will enable the Conference to gain a better understanding of potentially hazardous technologies and the risks associated with them. The preparation of such a report would also be in line with the goals and actions set forth in part III of the Agenda for Disarmament of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Second, we propose that the Conference review examples of the best practices adopted by various States for potential consideration of the risks and challenges to international security related to new technologies. Various measures, such as codes of conduct for scientists, have been taken at the national level. In our view, it is important to explore whether they are effective, make them part of a system and determine whether they can be made universal. The outcome of this process may be the formulation of rules or principles of conduct to prevent the ill-intentioned use of new developments in science and technology. We are of the view that, in the longer term, this could lead to negotiations on legally binding instruments.

Third, we propose that national measures to counter the attempts of non-State actors to obtain weapons of mass destruction should be studied and made systematic. The development of harmonized principles, or effective best practices, seems to be entirely within the mandate of the Conference and would be a fitting contribution to the non-proliferation and counter-terrorism activities of the United Nations.

Belarus is ready to engage constructively in those efforts with all the States members of the Conference. In September of this year, in Minsk, Belarus, together with the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, plans to hold a high-level international conference on using new and emerging technologies to counter terrorism. The agenda and organizational arrangements for the event are being wrapped up. We hope that the conference will make an important contribution to global efforts to combat terrorism. We intend to present the outcome of the event at a meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank Mr. Dapkiunas for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a moment in order to escort him from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Would any other delegation like to take the floor? That does not seem to be the case, in which case, this concludes our business for this morning. The next meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place this afternoon at 3 p.m., when we will hear the address of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres. The Secretary-General will be our first speaker, followed by the representatives of Australia, Ireland, Slovenia, Brazil, Italy and Hungary.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.