

# Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 26 February 2019 at 10.05 a.m.

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



**The President:** I call to order the 1486th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we will now continue the High-Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament. This morning we have six speakers on our list and seven more this afternoon. Before we continue, let me just remind you that you are all very welcome to the reception that will take place outside the chamber immediately following this morning's session to celebrate the opening of our exhibition on the 100 years of disarmament diplomacy in Geneva and 40 years of the Conference on Disarmament.

Allow me now to suspend the meeting to welcome our first distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Europe of the Slovak Republic.

*The meeting was briefly suspended.*

**The President:** Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. I thank the Minister for addressing the Conference on Disarmament and I give him the floor.

**Mr. Lajčák (Slovak Republic):** Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I would like to begin by congratulating Ambassador Liddle on assuming the presidency. You can count on Slovakia's full support to move the work of the Conference forward. I would also like to thank the previous presidency of Ukraine, for having worked at the helm of the Conference and put tireless effort into achieving consensus on the programme of work.

I want to start by clearly acknowledging the fact that, in the arms control and disarmament realm, we are not doing so well. The multilateral arms control and disarmament architecture has been deteriorating. We all know that. That is no breaking news. But 2018 and the first weeks of 2019 have been marked by a number of further setbacks.

Firstly, we saw the Chemical Weapons Convention – a treaty born in this chamber – repeatedly violated, including by the use of a nerve agent on European soil. Secondly, we are seeing the system of treaties eroding; old bilateral deals as well as newer multilateral arrangements seem to be unravelling. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the major nuclear non-proliferation success and a model case of multilateral diplomacy, is now basically on life-support. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty – which eliminated some of the most destabilizing offensive weapons from Europe – is now close to collapse. And we see existing potential for nuclear instability.

This is a worrisome state of affairs that requires our urgent action. Tensions and uncertainty are growing, while trust and predictability are eroding; the implications of the digital revolution on our societies, including on security and defence, remain poorly understood. The new and emerging technologies are not sufficiently reflected in our current arms control regimes. We need to mobilize and refresh our search for solutions. This situation must not continue, especially at this time of new vulnerabilities, interdependencies and challenges that are global in nature. And it need not.

To this end, let me emphasize three key points. First: it need not continue, if we recommit to multilateralism. Any road leading to a less regulated nuclear environment is perilous. Moving backwards and reproducing arms races from unregulated decades of the nuclear age does not serve anyone who seeks peace and stability. Such complex domains as arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation need rules and strong architecture. So now, first and foremost, we must honour the existing arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation commitments. They must be fully complied with, implemented and enforced. Rules must be respected.

And secondly, we need political will, will to compromise, lead the dialogue and work together. These two ingredients are interrelated. There will be political will to compromise and negotiate new disarmament instruments only if existing agreements are fully complied with. It is all the more disappointing to see the INF Treaty on the brink of

collapse after more than 30 years, despite intense diplomatic efforts by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union countries. Any disarmament treaty respected by only one party becomes unsustainable; but we believe there is still time to save it. Throughout the remaining five months, the United States and Russia should maintain channels for positive engagement on keeping the INF alive. And Russia has special responsibility to take transparent and verifiable steps towards full compliance with its treaty obligations. Otherwise, we risk a domino effect in the other existing regimes.

Furthermore, we need a relevant Conference on Disarmament. This Conference can be both the beneficiary of and a contributor to the renewed commitment to multilateralism. But if that is to happen, we need to revitalize it. And I am actually cautiously optimistic, because of the pragmatic approach we adopted two years ago. Through the formation of the five subsidiary bodies last year, we were able to conduct meaningful discussions. This work, including the adoption of four substantive reports, was a vital step forward and an important signal.

We should continue to build common ground and identify areas of convergence, so that we are better prepared for future negotiations at a time when conditions are more conducive – hopefully, in a not too distant future. We continue to emphasize the need to pay due attention to the enlargement of the membership and are ready to hold consultations on possible improvements to the working methods of the Conference.

In this sense, the draft proposal made by the United Kingdom to establish subsidiary bodies and positions of special coordinators could offer a realistic and viable way forward. Members must show strong political will and flexibility to compromise in order to achieve progress across the various Conference agenda items.

Third, we all need to do our part. Slovakia, together with our allies, will continue to support a progressive approach to mutually reinforcing legal measures and practical instruments to promote nuclear disarmament in a step-by-step manner. There are no shortcuts that can lead us towards “global zero”. Moreover, all countries in possession of nuclear weapons bear a special responsibility to make progress in the area of nuclear disarmament. Slovakia joins calls for a quick launch of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, on the basis of the decision contained in document CD/1299. We deem this matter advanced and ripe for negotiations in the Conference.

Slovakia will also continue to be a staunch supporter of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We are in favour of the verification capabilities under the Treaty regime being ready and available once it enters into force. Next year will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. As we move towards its 2020 Review Conference, all States parties to the Treaty must implement all assumed commitments. It is also critical that we continue to invest in efforts to promote the universalization of the Treaty to make it a truly global instrument. It is the shared responsibility of all States parties to make the 2020 Review Conference a success.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, this Conference remains the most important body for cooperation on disarmament and arms control. It bears legitimacy and has an essential purpose. We must do our best to move its work forward, find ways to build political will and trust; we owe it to future generations. As some say, it is two minutes to midnight. Let’s reverse the Doomsday Clock.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency Mr. Lajčák for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting briefly to escort His Excellency from the chamber.

*The meeting was briefly suspended.*

**The President:** The meeting is resumed. I would like now to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Josip Brkić, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I thank the Minister for addressing the Conference on Disarmament and give him the floor.

**Mr. Brkić** (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and dear friends, it is my great honour to address you here today, in Geneva, during the High-Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament. We are all faced with many new challenges and significant changes in the geopolitical landscape – the growing problem of terrorism and radicalization around the world; new conflict zones everywhere; the migrant and refugee crises; a shift in powers and relations between countries and regions in the world – just to name a few.

Security and stability is a strategic interest and a cornerstone of my country's foreign policy – something we probably share with many of you here. It is simply a prerequisite for economic and cultural development, international trade, as well as for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in various areas with other countries. In today's world, the security and stability of sovereign states is endangered in many traditional ways, but also in new non-traditional ways, by various actors on an international scale. The increasingly unconventional nature of threats to stability and security requires a comprehensive response.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one of its strategic foreign policy goals, seeks full membership in the European Union and has very close cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It has always supported effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order. The United Nations system represents moral authority and a forum of international legitimacy in a world that increasingly continues to challenge global rules and norms. As a core part of the multilateral system, the United Nations is indispensable for ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security.

The current continuously changing and challenging security environment concerns us all. Regional conflicts, international tensions, military build-up and the global threat of terrorism all continually change and strain the global non-proliferation and disarmament structure. And the Conference on Disarmament, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, has a crucial role in all of this.

The Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors have negotiated many major multilateral arms limitations and disarmament agreements, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, to name but a few. Yet, while we do not need many words to convince ourselves or others of the significance of and need for the Conference, it is no secret that the Conference on Disarmament has, for some time now, found itself in a stalemate. The United Nations Secretary-General and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs have, on several occasions, expressed their continued support and their commitment to bringing the Conference on Disarmament back on track.

Many States, both members and non-members of the Conference on Disarmament, remain deeply concerned about the ongoing stalemate and the continued failure to agree on a programme of work. It is encouraging, however, to see the valiant efforts made by several presidencies of the Conference to try to find common ground and break years of deadlock.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a State party to the Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention, the Cluster Munitions Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention; and a High Contracting Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and all its protocols. It takes a more active role in relation to some of these than others, but we put them all on equal footing when it comes to their significance and impact. And even though we are not a member of the Conference on Disarmament, Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the work of the Conference as a non-member State on a regular basis.

We welcome the efforts by the Ukrainian presidency and now by the United Kingdom presidency during this year's session, as well as efforts by other presidencies in previous sessions. Despite the fact that, due to diverging views, no consensus was reached, the exchanges – whether in the working group on the way ahead in 2017 or in the subsidiary bodies in 2018 – proved quite useful to helping understand the different positions and concerns of States.

The new decision proposed by the United Kingdom on the establishment of subsidiary bodies and special coordinators for the 2019 session is a step in the right

direction. As there is no consensus on launching negotiations on any issue at this time, the creation of subsidiary bodies and special coordinators will provide necessary structure to the Conference on Disarmament for the 2019 session, based on its four core issues: nuclear disarmament; fissile material; preventing an arms race in outer space; and negative security assurances. Regardless of complex dialogue and how negotiations might appear or turn out to be, we must simply continue the process and find common ground on which to finally move the work of the Conference on Disarmament forward.

As a multicultural and multi-ethnic State, at the crossroads between East and West, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a rather complicated and very complex government structure. And, just like the Conference on Disarmament, Bosnia and Herzegovina works, lives and breathes through the concept of consensus. While it may be occasionally slow, possibly painful and certainly not easy, it is crucial, and it is the only way forward. We do it because we know what is at stake and what we want for our children and our future.

The Conference on Disarmament has important and crucial work ahead – crucial for our children and for our future – and we need to find a way, together, to move that work forward. Substantial political will and creative thinking from all of us are the minimum if we are to overcome this impasse. But we do need to move forward, to stop worrying trends, to restore dialogue and trust and to move from confrontation to cooperation, so that we can face these crucial global challenges together.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency Mr. Brkić for his statement. I will now suspend the meeting to escort His Excellency from the chamber and await the arrival of our next distinguished guest for the morning, His Excellency Mr. Paul Teesalu, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, who is scheduled to speak at 11.45 a.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.*

**The President:** The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to suspend this meeting to welcome our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Paul Teesalu, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

*The meeting was briefly suspended.*

**The President:** The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Paul Teesalu, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia. I thank His Excellency for addressing the Conference on Disarmament and give him the floor.

**Mr. Teesalu (Estonia):** Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen I would like to begin by congratulating Ambassador Liddle on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You can count on my delegation's full support. I would also like to extend my best wishes to the other presidencies of the 2019 session.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, the current global security environment has become increasingly serious and unpredictable. The security threats are more complex than ever – proliferation and even use of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, violent extremism, malicious cyberactivities and hybrid threats. Unfortunately, erosion of the rules and of the treaty-based international security order has contributed to these threats evolving. Over the past years, we have witnessed the long-standing core principles of international law being disregarded and international obligations being violated.

We share the view of the Secretary-General that there is an urgent need for greater international efforts to achieve a safer world and a collective response to global and regional security challenges. For this purpose, it is essential to continue to uphold and strengthen the existing multilateral security architecture. The effectiveness and viability of non-proliferation and the arms control and disarmament regimes require the rules to be followed and agreements to be fully complied with, implemented and enforced by all the parties.

Mr. President, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains one of the most serious concerns for international peace and security. The repeated use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and in the United Kingdom last year has gravely undermined the universal prohibition against the use of such weapons. It is vital to maintain

and further advance the global norm prohibiting chemical weapons and enhance the effectiveness of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We therefore regret that there was no consensual outcome of the Fourth Review Conference of the Convention. However, we attach great importance to the decision of the Special Session of the Conference of States Parties of the Convention last June to improve the capacity of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons and develop a universal attribution mechanism.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty has constituted a key instrument of strategic stability and the foundation of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control for the past three decades. We find it regrettable that the Russian Federation has decided to suspend its obligation under the Treaty rather than addressing its non-compliance during the next months. We note with concern that the proliferation of missile technology remains a serious challenge. In this regard, we believe that the missile technology control regime under the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation plays an important role in preventing missile proliferation. We believe that our country's membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime would strengthen the Regime and international non-proliferation efforts. We also speak strongly for the membership of all European Union member States in the Missile Technology Control Regime, since they all meet the highest standards and criteria that it sets. Entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is yet another challenge. We support international efforts to this end and urge all States to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay. We welcome its ratification by Zimbabwe this year.

Lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula can only be achieved through peaceful means. We welcome the ongoing diplomatic efforts with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that have contributed to easing tensions. However, until the Democratic People's Republic of Korea takes concrete steps towards complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization, all States must continue to strictly enforce existing sanctions. We call upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to compliance with its international obligations under the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

We also underline the need for Iran to continue to abide strictly by all its nuclear-related commitments and cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Mr. President, Estonia recognizes that cybersecurity has become a crucial issue in the context of international peace and security. The role and involvement of the United Nations in seeking a consensus on norms of responsible State behaviour are increasingly relevant. Estonia has been a member of four United Nations Groups of Governmental Experts that have, over the years, produced a number of recommendations, which the General Assembly has repeatedly endorsed. Estonia supports the further development of a strategic framework for conflict prevention and stability in cyberspace that is based on international law, in particular the United Nations Charter, the development and implementation of universal norms of responsible State behaviour and regional confidence-building measures.

We share the view that we must maintain a safe, secure and sustainable outer space. It is essential to prevent an arms race in outer space and preclude outer space from becoming another area of conflict in order to strengthen international security and stability. While not excluding the possibility of negotiating a legally binding norm that is comprehensive, effective and verifiable in the future, we believe that nations should first agree on voluntary principles of responsible behaviour in outer space.

Mr. President, as we approach the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) next year, we must do our utmost to uphold and further reinforce its role as a major multilateral instrument of international security. Since its entry into force in 1970, the NPT has been a cornerstone of the global efforts to pursue nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy. Estonia shares the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons and continues to advocate pursuit of the "Progressive Approach" in a realistic and responsible way. To this end, Estonia supports the commencement of negotiations within the Conference on Disarmament on the

fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). We welcome the report presented by the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group, in which an Estonian expert also actively participated. We hope that the Conference on Disarmament will use this opportunity to take up the valuable outcome of the group's work in order to start negotiations to further advance the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. I would like hereby to voice our strong wish to take part in the future negotiations and to reiterate my country's request to participate fully and equally in disarmament discussions as a full member of the Conference on Disarmament. The central role of the Conference on Disarmament is to negotiate multilateral disarmament treaties according to its mandate. We believe that negotiations such as those on the FMCT and discussions on matters of global importance must be addressed in universally representative bodies and should include all sovereign States who wish to be part of them. My country's membership application from the year 2001 is still valid pending the decision of the Conference on Disarmament on its enlargement.

Mr. President, this year marks 40 years since the establishment of the Conference on Disarmament. Efforts to bring the Conference on Disarmament back on track will continue to require sustained political will from all Conference on Disarmament members. We encourage the Conference to make further efforts to break the impasse.

We would like to extend our warm thanks to the Ambassador of Ukraine and his team for their work in seeking consensus on this year's draft programme of work. However, we also share your pragmatic view, Mr. President, that there is a lot of merit in building and deepening the discussions of last year. The establishment of subsidiary bodies on four core issues would create more understanding of each other's positions and would allow more structure than technical discussions throughout the year. We also welcome your proposal to appoint two special coordinators on new and emerging technologies and on the Conference on Disarmament working methods and membership. The Conference on Disarmament should keep up with the latest developments in science and technology and we believe that discussions on these topics, while avoiding duplication with other forums, would be beneficial. We have also long called for the nomination of a special rapporteur to review the issue of membership and we are convinced that the advancement of the membership issue could become an achievement for the Conference and ensure its relevance.

Finally, running for the United Nations Security Council for the period 2020–2021 demonstrates my country's long-term commitment to take more responsibility for promoting international peace and security. Estonia remains fully committed to the rules-based and treaty-based multilateral system, effective implementation of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control instruments and international efforts to revitalize multilateral negotiating bodies, in particular the Conference on Disarmament.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency Mr. Teesalu for his statement. Please allow me now to suspend the meeting in order to escort Mr. Teesalu from the chamber. Our next speaker is expected at about 12.15 p.m.

*The meeting was briefly suspended.*

**The President:** The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest, Her Excellency Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. I thank the Minister for addressing the Conference on Disarmament and give her the floor.

**Ms. Kaag (Netherlands):** Mr. President, Excellencies, a year has gone by since my last address to the Conference; I was speaking in a different capacity then, but it is still a great pleasure to be back here today. We have to acknowledge the black cloud that has been hanging over this meeting during the past year, with global tensions on the rise, our international rules-based order increasingly being challenged and new threats emerging.

Proliferation continues to dominate the global agenda and, while disarmament and non-proliferation are needed now more than ever, we have seen serious threats to the multilateral agreements we have established together, agreements that were hard fought for, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention, violations of which can only be detrimental to international peace and security.

In a similar vein, we have witnessed the removal of a crucial signature to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. These difficult times therefore require an extraordinary effort by all of us to uphold our international norms; norms that contribute to lasting results in disarmament and, therefore, in international security. In doing so, we must show that we, the international community, are willing to keep pursuing cooperation instead of division, success instead of failure, ambition instead of apathy. It is possible. Let us not forget that it was our ambition to create a more secure, more prosperous world that pushed us to establish those norms in the first place. So the cloud has a silver lining.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference and its predecessors have done incredibly important work in negotiating the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. All three are pivotal to our disarmament architecture; each is essential to the world's security and prosperity.

The Ottawa Convention is another example. It shows the transformational power that international norms can have. For more than two decades, the States parties to this Convention have vowed never to use anti-personnel mines again and have committed themselves to the eradication of these mines and explosive remnants of war. Together, in 2017 alone, we were able to clear over 128 million square metres of contaminated land. For instance, 28 million square metres of land was cleared in Afghanistan and at least another 16 million in Iraq. What is more, thousands and thousands of civilians have received mine-risk education and victim assistance.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions provides yet another example. It has been invaluable in outlawing the use, production and transfer of these indiscriminate weapons. Communities living in contaminated areas have become safer. The case of Afghanistan shows us that it is working: contaminated areas will be cleared well ahead of the deadline under the Convention. It also shows that disarmament helps prevent civilian casualties. It allows families to return to their homes, men and women to farm their land, children to go to school safely and local markets to reopen.

Disarmament is an essential condition for sustainable inclusive development and human security. It can never be seen as a stand-alone effort. I am proud that my country has been able to make a substantial contribution. We are an active and committed State party and, with our multiannual Mine Action and Cluster Munitions Programme, we spend €15 million a year in 14 different countries. That is on top of our annual contributions to the United Nations Mine Action Service. Together we have achieved much in these areas, simply because we dared to be ambitious.

Mr. President, Excellencies, our work is far from over. On the contrary. We need to take a comprehensive, multilateral and ambitious approach to the questions before us. With that in mind, the Netherlands welcomes the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament and supports its implementation. The Netherlands also stands ready to contribute, by championing: action 31: to foster accountability and adherence to emerging norms in cyberspace; action 18: to strengthen interagency coordination on improvised explosive devices; and action 21: building understanding on the impact of arms on conflict management.

As a country with a reputation in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament and a firm belief in multilaterally agreed solutions, the Netherlands' ultimate ambition is for the Conference on Disarmament to take back its rightful place as the sole forum for disarmament negotiations. We do not have the luxury of waiting until the geopolitical context looks brighter. Instead, we should be bold enough to seize opportunities when they arise. I believe we must, and I believe we can.

Last year, we saw important progress in our subsidiary bodies. For the first time in more than 20 years, we adopted four substantive reports by consensus. The Netherlands attaches special importance to the report on the ban on the production of fissile materials and other nuclear explosive devices. We regard the conclusion of such a treaty as an essential step towards our shared disarmament goals. It demonstrates to us that real progress is possible – even if we move only step by step, and even under the most arduous

of circumstances. This requires willingness, flexibility and a shared ambition on the part of all countries present here to seize – or to create – the opportunity.

In this context, let me touch on another opportunity that lies ahead: the upcoming session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, followed by the Conference itself. Allow me to remind you that, in 1995, against all odds, the international community succeeded in indefinitely extending the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Collaborating along established lines of confrontation was one of the keys to the success of that extension.

It is our wish to unlock that kind of cooperation again. Building on our experience as Chair of the 2017 Preparatory Committee, the Netherlands continues to work constructively with Poland and Malaysia, the Co-Chairs of this review cycle. We are aiming for a successful outcome of the 2020 Review Conference, for example, by improving the working methods of the review cycle.

If we can do that, then we might find in one year from now, as we gather here again, that the black cloud has somehow and somewhat lifted. But each and every one of us has to find the courage and the political will to push for real, substantial and substantive progress. And for that progress to be achieved, Excellencies, the only answer lies in multilateralism. I hope we can keep pushing forward together.

**The President:** I thank Her Excellency Ms. Kaag for her statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Her Excellency from the chamber.

*The meeting was briefly suspended.*

**The President:** The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our next distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia. I thank His Excellency for addressing the Conference on Disarmament and give him the floor.

**Mr. Rinkēvičs (Latvia):** Mr. President, I would like to congratulate the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and express my country's full support and cooperation. I also would like to praise the outgoing presidency of Ukraine for its effort in the search of consensus on the work programme. I also express my appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament for their endeavours to facilitate active international discussion on disarmament and non-proliferation matters.

The Conference on Disarmament has played a crucial role in championing essential discussions in order to create the global disarmament acquis. Precisely as a result of the immense body of work done by the Conference and its predecessor bodies, today we have a number of important treaties at our disposal. This has been made possible by a combination of determined diplomatic efforts and resolute political will.

Five years ago, in this same place, I called for the re-establishment of a climate of trust and confidence among participating States and the restoration of a sense of common purpose in the Conference on Disarmament. I saw the truth in Shakespeare's words, "Men at some time are masters of their fates, the fault ... is not in our stars, but in ourselves." Five years later, the fault is still in us.

Procedural manoeuvres and lack of political will have kept us from making real progress. However, the global challenges have not eased. They cannot be addressed by unilateral actions alone. It is the responsibility of member States to advance the disarmament machinery and break the deadlock.

I reiterate our long-standing concern that the Conference has still failed to agree on a substantive programme of work. The establishment of subsidiary bodies would make it possible to continue focused and structured discussions in 2019 to advance the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, it is our collective duty to avoid the erosion of the rules-based international order and to preserve and strengthen the existing agreements. Let me start with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, two landmark conventions negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament.

In recent years, the Chemical Weapons Convention has been defied on a number of occasions. This type of behaviour poses a serious threat to the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime that we have committed to protect and strengthen. No one and no place should ever be exposed to such horrendous attacks and threats. Hence, it is our duty and responsibility to uphold the long-standing international norm prohibiting the use of chemical weapons.

Latvia also has high hopes of strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention regime. We should do everything in our power to prevent the threat of biological weapons becoming a reality. We deeply regret that the 2016 Review Conference fell short of expectations. The agreement on substantive activities reached at the 2017 meeting of States parties, which was followed by expert work in 2018, gave some hope that we can succeed in the implementation of this important instrument. Nevertheless, we remain preoccupied by the dire financial situation around the Convention, which is putting the secretariat and its work under considerable strain. Measures adopted at the 2018 meeting are steps in the right direction, but they will not remedy the chronic failure of some member States to honour their financial obligations under the Convention. I urge all States parties to fulfil their financial obligations under both Conventions on time and in full.

Mr. President, we are pleased to see the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at the core of our security and stability. Latvia strongly believes that 50 years of the Treaty has extensively contributed to our arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. The Treaty, with its three pillars, remains the cornerstone of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts, and the key element in reinforcing international peace and stability. Hence, as the 2020 NPT Review Conference is approaching, it is our responsibility to uphold and preserve the NPT, to promote and strengthen its implementation. The lack of the long-awaited breakthrough in the Conference on Disarmament is creating parallel processes in other formats that risk undermining the Treaty.

We strongly believe that the right way forward lies in a progressive approach to nuclear disarmament. Any nuclear disarmament efforts must consider the wider security context and strategic stability. In this regard, the building blocks set out in the 2010 NPT Review Conference action plan have not lost their relevance. We should hold on to comprehensive, balanced and full implementation of the plan. Along with multilateral initiatives on disarmament, the role of the P5 process looms particularly large. We welcome the nuclear-weapons States' commitment to enhance coordination and dialogue under the process. In the present security environment, interaction among the P5 States has a major impact on international security and stability. We welcome the commitment of those States to the NPT and all its aspects, including their support for the safeguard system of the International Atomic Energy Agency that was reiterated at the P5 conference last month in Beijing, China.

We support the further work on nuclear disarmament verification taking place in the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts and in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. We also have high hopes for the dialogue about disarmament policy and the emergence of the initiative on creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament, which was announced in October 2018.

Mr. President, Latvia supports sustainable and effective international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. We note the important role that the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty has played in strengthening Euro-Atlantic security for the past three decades. That was possible because of constructive dialogue between the parties and full compliance with their treaty obligations. However, arms control can be effective only if all the parties abide by its rules. Russia's violations of the INF Treaty have eroded its effectiveness. We now need open, frank and constructive discussions to establish the trust required for effective multilateral negotiations in order to prevent a vacuum in the multilateral arms control architecture.

Last but not least, Latvia welcomes the global effort to mainstream the gender perspective in disarmament. Full and equal participation of women and men in all decision-making activities and levels is important for the credibility of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts in the long term. As our national contribution to this objective, Latvia proposed addressing gender and gender-based violence as the priority theme of its presidency of the Fifth Conference of the States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty. It is based on three pillars: gender balance in representation, gendered impact of armed violence and conflict, and how best to include aspects of gender-based violence in the risk assessment of arms transfers. Our aim is to reach consensus at the Conference of the States Parties on the practical measures that States could take to mitigate the negative effects of gender-based violence.

To conclude, since 2004, Latvia has been one of 27 States which have joined up to continuously lend credibility to the Conference on Disarmament as the main international body for negotiations on disarmament. Therefore, Latvia believes that it is important to continue consultations on expanding the membership of the Conference.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency Mr. Rinkēvičs for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort His Excellency from the chamber.

*The meeting was briefly suspended.*

**The President:** The meeting is resumed. At this stage, would any other delegation like to take the floor? That does not seem to be the case. That concludes our business for this morning. The next meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place this afternoon, at 2.45 p.m. with the address by our first speaker, His Excellency Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, followed by dignitaries from Belgium, Egypt, South Africa, Malaysia, Norway, Iraq and Sri Lanka.

Before adjourning the meeting, I would just like to remind you once again that you are all very welcome to join us outside the Council Chamber for our reception to celebrate the opening of the disarmament exhibition celebrating 100 years of disarmament diplomacy in Geneva and 40 years of the Conference on Disarmament. Otherwise, I look forward to welcoming you back to the chamber this afternoon for the continuation of the high-level segment. The meeting is adjourned.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*