

Conference on Disarmament

English

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


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 26 February 2019, at 2.50 p.m.

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

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The President: I call to order the 1487th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon we shall continue the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me now to suspend the meeting to welcome our first guest of the afternoon, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. The meeting is suspended.

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 Jacek Czaputowicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz (Poland): Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to speak in this historic Council Chamber of the United Nations Office at Geneva. It has witnessed the breakthrough moments in the most recent history of disarmament. The fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament is a good moment for reflection on the Conference's achievements and prospects for the future.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century we were convinced that we were entering a new era of peace, stability and good economic prospects. After 19 years we can conclude that the international community is still far away from this picture. We are facing multiple challenges, such as protracted conflicts, lack of respect for international rules, regional instability, violation of human rights and illegal migration.

All these problems are of a global nature or have global consequences. Accordingly, they need global solutions. The United Nations system is at our disposal – are we making good use of its tools and instruments? The Conference on Disarmament is an example of limited success in this regard. Geneva, as a cradle of international cooperation, should be our source of inspiration. As we celebrate 100 years of multilateralism we need to state very firmly that the law-based international order must be upheld. The Conference on Disarmament is an important part of this order.

The relevance of this Conference depends, however, on its ability to deliver according to its mandate. Meanwhile, the lack of progress in disarmament is plain to see. We urgently need to begin negotiations in order to open new prospects for current and future generations.

We attach high priority to an early launch of the negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty. We believe that it would make possible the strengthening of nuclear non-proliferation on the path to complete disarmament. The treaty would contribute greatly to enhancing international security and to countering the potential use of fissile materials by non-State actors.

We highly appreciate the efforts of the Ukrainian and the United Kingdom presidencies to revive the Conference on Disarmament. We hope that further steps in this direction will be made by the United States and following presidencies this year. Potential disarmament negotiations are only part of this very complex patchwork of essential activities. We need bolder diplomatic efforts to improve the overall climate for security and disarmament.

As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Poland attaches great importance to regional stability, including that of Central and Eastern Europe. The breach of the Budapest Memorandum with the deployment of dual-capable means of delivery in the vicinity of our borders, has led to the deterioration of the security environment.

In 1967, the Secretary-General of the United Nations U Thant stated: "There is imperative need for making a fresh search for peace in the Middle East so that the rights of all countries in the area may be respected". Fifty years later, we can only repeat these words. The ministerial meeting to promote a future of peace and security in the Middle East, which took place in mid-February in Warsaw, focused on developing a positive vision for this region. It is in the interests of the entire international community to help our partners in the

Middle East to stabilize the situation on the ground and enter a new stage of prosperity and cooperation.

The ongoing review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is a crucial path towards confirming the relevance of this Treaty in 2020 and sending a strong political message to our societies in order to reduce anxiety related to nuclear weapons. By chairing the second session of the preparatory committee, Poland is proud to be part of this important review process. During our chairship we spared no effort in upholding the integrity and credibility of the Treaty, to create an environment for an inclusive, mutually respectful and transparent dialogue and to deliver practical solutions for the 2020 Review Conference – which will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We hope that progress achieved in this regard will contribute to the positive outcome of the 2020 Review Conference, enhancing the Treaty and its further implementation.

We highly value all bilateral and trilateral efforts undertaken by the United States, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea aiming at the future denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We hope that the summit in Viet Nam will pave the way for further tangible steps to that end. As a member of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission since 1953, Poland is strongly engaged in the activities aimed at establishing lasting peace and security in this region.

In conclusion, let me refer once again to the leitmotiv of my intervention. The United Nations system is the most precious element of our international relations. It equips us with a variety of tools to influence political, economic and social situation in the world. At the same time, we must act at both bilateral and regional levels to ensure that global solutions bring about a positive change. I hope that the Conference on Disarmament will soon be reinvigorated by a joint effort that bears lasting fruit in the future.

The President: I thank Mr. Czaputowicz for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Czaputowicz 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 distinguished guest, His Excellency Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs and of Defence in charge of collaboration between the Belgian federal State and the Brussels capital region (Beliris) and of the federal cultural institutions of Belgium. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Reynders (Belgium): Thank you very much for your introduction. I will now switch to French (*spoke in French*).

Mr. President, allow me, first of all, to wish you every success in your role as President of the Conference on Disarmament. Be assured of my country's full support of your mission. The arms control situation is at a delicate stage. A treaty crucial to Europe's security is at risk of disintegrating in six months' time. Another treaty is slow to enter into force. The deterioration in the global security environment and the growing mistrust among powers limits the scope for embarking on new initiatives. We all know the problems that prevent the Conference on Disarmament from playing the role for which it was created. However, new opportunities are emerging, for those who want to see them. A few changes that are achievable in the short-term could enable the Conference to assume its new role as the sole multilateral body for negotiations in the area of disarmament. Today, I would like to focus on these opportunities.

First, it is important to address the issue of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. While the stumbling blocks to the start of negotiations are well known, the work carried out by the experts over recent years has helped to prepare the ground and identify the substantive issues to be explored at a later stage. The report of the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group sets out all the provisions that could potentially be included in such a treaty. It also clearly demonstrates that one of the most contentious issues – stocks – cannot

be reduced to a black and white choice. This issue can only be resolved during the negotiations on a treaty. Therefore, we believe, together with the Chair of the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group, Ambassador Heidi Hulan, that the preparatory phase can be finalized and the negotiations on a treaty can begin.

To achieve a world without nuclear weapons, we must also step up our efforts to put in place a comprehensive and verified nuclear test ban. It is for this reason that we regret the postponement of the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was negotiated in this august setting over 20 years ago. Furthermore, the announcement of the cessation of nuclear tests by the only State that has performed them this century has brought a glimmer of hope. This hope must nevertheless be given substantive form, in particular through efforts to ensure the sustainability, irreversibility and monitoring of this declaration of intent. The Treaty is the central instrument in this regard. The accession of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty must therefore be part of the solution to denuclearize the country. However, only the entry into force of the Treaty enables the employment of all the verification measures provided for therein. A positive move by the other annex II States towards accession to the Treaty therefore remains necessary. We are pleased that this wave continues, as recently seen once more with the ratification by Thailand and Zimbabwe and the signing by Tuvalu.

As Co-Coordinator with Iraq of the process under article 14, Belgium will continue to promote the entry into force of the Treaty and encourage further accessions.

We reiterate once again that accession to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty must not be dependent on the actions of other States. While the work we are all doing towards the Treaty will not be finished by the end of my country's mandate, the dynamism and enthusiasm of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization youth group give me hope. This dynamism and enthusiasm will act, I am convinced, as inspiration and a call to our collective duty towards future generations to achieve a world free from nuclear tests.

Mistrust among the powers has increased and non-compliance with treaty provisions is certainly one of the reasons. As we are currently experiencing in Europe, a bilateral treaty that is respected by only one party will see its foundations collapse. The disappearance of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty would have serious consequences for the global arms control system and would leave a dangerous void. Failure to act on this development is inconceivable, and I of course call first on Russia to fulfil its obligations. The violation of the norm prohibiting chemical weapons has also contributed to this growing mistrust. The exemplary moral force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction can only be fully restored through a unified and firm response by States that respect their obligations.

Violations of this standard are everyone's business, and everyone should condemn them and support appropriate measures to redress the situation, including the decision to create an allocation mechanism within the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Chemical weapon attacks have confronted us with the fact that we must tirelessly pursue our efforts to ban chemical weapons. In order to equip the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons more effectively for this task and to provide the technical secretariat with the most effective analytical and capacity-building tools, Belgium has donated €2 million to the construction of a new laboratory in the Netherlands. We hope that many other States will reaffirm their support for the fight against the plague of chemical weapons by supporting this new laboratory. Contributions, however modest, send a strong signal in this regard.

All those who hope for real progress in disarmament have been encouraged by the publication of the new disarmament programme of the United Nations Secretary-General. The Secretary-General rightly seeks to place disarmament and non-proliferation right back at the centre of the Organization's work. We wish to support these efforts to revitalize the beneficial role that arms control has always played and can continue to play, providing that

States generate the necessary political will. We must reconnect with the key strengths of arms control.

First, its ability to save human lives through treaties prohibiting inhuman and long-lived weapons, such as anti-personnel mines or cluster munitions, and also through instruments and agreements that combat illicit trafficking in weapons and prevent their diversion. Second, the capacity of arms control to promote trust among States. For this reason, the new Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms, which is the only existing restriction to the deployment of strategic nuclear weapons, must be maintained and extended beyond 2021. It is also important that this treaty is followed by other initiatives to reduce strategic and non-strategic nuclear arsenals, both deployed and non-deployed. Nowadays, there is less contact between the two nuclear superpowers than during the cold war, in terms of arms control. New mechanisms and contact forums must therefore be established to foster dialogue. Furthermore, the obligation to improve transparency and strengthen mutual trust derives from the obligations formally assumed by the nuclear-weapon States in the review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This obligation is part of the risk reduction effort to which each nuclear-weapon State is bound. This effort comes under the 2010 action plan, which remains the detailed road map that should be followed in order to achieve the specific progress envisaged under the three pillars of the Treaty.

For Belgium, it is essential to revitalize action on the implementation of article 6 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons through the effective reduction of all types of nuclear weapons, a decrease in the role of nuclear weapons in defence doctrines, efforts to extend alert times, and measures to reduce the risk of accidents or unauthorized attacks.

The Conference on Disarmament must assume its role in the disarmament work before us. We welcome the efforts made by the Ukrainian Presidency at the beginning of the year to establish a programme of work that is acceptable to all. This work has made it possible to identify areas of conflict and current challenges. We support the proposals presented by you, Mr. President, to continue this substantial work by setting up subsidiary bodies, around the four fundamental agenda items. Particular attention should be paid to topics ready for real progress, such as the issue of nuclear disarmament verification, for which we can refer to the work already carried out by the group of governmental experts and voluntary initiatives, such as the international partnership which my country is part of. Real progress seems to us to be a stone's throw away but dependent on good cooperation and dialogue based on mutual respect within the Conference. We are open to a discussion on working methods and the composition of the Conference, and we can support your proposal to appoint a special coordinator in this regard. We consider that the functioning of the Conference would benefit from greater continuity between presidencies and from a smoother transition from one year to the next.

Mr. President, I began my intervention, and will close it, on a note of hope. Despite the ongoing modernization of nuclear arsenals, the erosion of the international legal framework and the institutional difficulties of the disarmament mechanism, the imperative of risk reduction requires that we return to good arms control practices as the driving force of confidence-building among States. Through the determination of those who defend an international regime based on the rule of law, I am certain that we will succeed.

I thank you for your attention; and thank you, Mr. President, for your warm welcome and for the programme that you wish to put in place.

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

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest, His Excellency Sameh Hassan Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Shoukry (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you very much. Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament during this important phase in its most recent session. I also wish to express my country's appreciation for the efforts made by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, who have continued to provide important support to the work of the Conference. I would like to reiterate my country's continued support for the presidency of the Conference and its constructive efforts to adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work. Egypt hopes that, during the 2019 session, the Conference will once again become effective and will reassume its pivotal role in negotiating international disarmament treaties and agreements.

Mr. President, for more than two decades, the Conference on Disarmament has been at an impasse. During this long period, despite ceaseless efforts, it has been unable to adopt a programme of work which would enable it to perform its designated role. This situation is both frustrating and unacceptable. It should motivate us all to review the reasons that have led to this outcome and to redouble our efforts to rectify the situation in order to preserve the credibility of the Conference, ensure that it is able to properly fulfil its responsibilities with regard to strengthening international security and allow it to resume its customary role as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament.

The continued stagnation that has hampered the Conference during this long period not only harms its work and its credibility, but also reinforces a trend that is having an increasing impact on current international relations; at the core of this trend is the fact that many countries now devise foreign policy objectives that focus solely on narrow national interests, rather than taking a more comprehensive approach to protecting common security interests that transcend those of individual States. If the international community wishes to get out of this impasse and restore the Conference to its historically pivotal disarmament role, States must avoid adopting unilateral positions that undermine opportunities to achieve collective security and must demonstrate the flexibility and political will required to revitalize the Conference and restore it to its former role.

Egypt hoped that the Conference would soon adopt a decision establishing the subsidiary bodies required to address the items on the Conference's agenda. This would be the first step to making progress during the current session and would pave the way for the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work in the near future.

Mr. President, for many decades, on many occasions and in many forums, many members of the international community, including Egypt, have called for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, as one of the main pillars of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. These calls have fallen on deaf ears, however. Large quantities of nuclear weapons still exist, a fact which poses a serious threat to international security. The concept of nuclear deterrence remains prevalent in the doctrines of certain military alliances, and nuclear weapons continue to be a fundamental pillar of such doctrines for many States. We have watched as these States continue to develop new generations of nuclear weapons, spread them throughout the territories of other States and conduct comprehensive policy reviews to allow them to develop their nuclear arsenals. These States also continually oppose all international efforts to ban nuclear weapons, by, for example, boycotting the United Nations negotiations on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty held in 2017. Such action leads us to question the commitment of those States to the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, particularly since, at the same time, they are spearheading calls for the nuclear non-proliferation regime to be applied more vigorously against parties that they feel pose a threat to their strategic interests. This serves only to discredit those States themselves and may even potentially drive other States to attempt to acquire nuclear weapons in order to avoid being targeted.

It is also surprising that these States, which are so loudly calling for the more vigorous application of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, are otherwise inactive, failing even to promote the universal application of the Treaty. In both cases, this position is undeniably incompatible with the Treaty.

In the light of these developments, Egypt reaffirms the need for all States to uphold the Treaty in letter and in spirit. Egypt remains deeply concerned that, 50 years after the Treaty was opened for signature – article 6 of which sets out the clear legal obligation of the nuclear States to disarm – nuclear weapons remain prevalent around the world, undermining international peace and security and increasing sources of tension and instability around the world. Furthermore, this comes against a backdrop of an international scene that is increasingly threatened by challenges in various regions. The loss of credibility in the Treaty is a cause for concern for which the nuclear States bear responsibility, as they are the ones that have sought to perpetuate the discriminatory circumstances surrounding the Treaty, thereby eroding the moral foundations of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The idea promoted by some nuclear States that the global security situation and international political conditions will not allow for further progress to be made towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons is based on faulty logic. On the contrary, nuclear disarmament is key to creating a safer security environment and a more stable international situation. Until tangible steps are taken in that regard, the world will continue to suffer from risks, threats and insecurity. Nuclear disarmament is, ultimately, a legal obligation, the fulfilment of which must not be dependent on political assessments or agreements. Egypt therefore calls on the nuclear States to assume their responsibilities without delay, including their obligation to dispose of all their nuclear weapons, and to start to make progress towards those goals, in line with their commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which they have thus far failed to meet – a fact which amounts to non-compliance with the Treaty.

In the same vein, nuclear disarmament remains a major priority within the Conference and must be pursued in a verifiable and non-discriminatory manner. There is growing recognition among the international community of the serious humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and of the irrefutable facts established by the conferences held in Norway, Mexico and Austria. This increased awareness was undoubtedly a factor in driving the international community to conclude a non-discriminatory, legal treaty on the elimination of nuclear weapons, following the negotiations held in New York for that purpose. Although it is regrettable that this achievement was not made within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament, the Conference must continue to make efforts to achieve that same goal by negotiating its own comprehensive treaty on the elimination of nuclear weapons that sets out both the time frames to be met and the irrevocable and internationally verifiable progress that must be made.

In this context, Egypt reaffirms its support for efforts to launch negotiations on an international treaty banning the production and stockpiling of fissile material. Such a treaty must serve as a tool for achieving nuclear disarmament, however, and must not be allowed to become merely another non-proliferation mechanism designed to perpetuate the prevailing imbalance in the status quo.

Egypt attaches special importance to developing and strengthening the existing legal framework to promote and protect the peaceful uses of outer space and to ensure that it remains the shared heritage of all humankind. It also supports all measures required to prevent outer space becoming the new site of conflict or an arms race. For several years, in rotation with Sri Lanka, Egypt has submitted a draft resolution to prevent an arms race in outer space to the United Nations General Assembly. The negotiations to develop a legally binding instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space are of the utmost importance, particularly given the rise in alarming trends that are paving the way for the weaponization of outer space, as well as the anti-satellite capabilities that numerous States are developing.

Mr. President, never before has the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty faced so many serious challenges. Egypt is deeply concerned about the effect of these challenges on the credibility of the Treaty. Undoubtedly, the failure of some States parties to the Treaty to respect their obligations thereunder is at the root of the problem. We once again recall that those States have failed to fulfil their nuclear disarmament obligations. They have also cooperated on nuclear activities with States that are not parties to the Treaty and have attempted to implement individual and collective measures to impede cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, despite this being one of the main pillars of the Treaty.

Furthermore, the failure of the international community to achieve the universality of the Treaty has had an adverse impact on its efficacy. Although a small number of States continue to refuse to become parties to the Treaty, the States parties to the Treaty have failed to take any action to address the situation, instead choosing to support the positions of those non-States parties or even undermining the mechanisms and outcomes produced by the NPT review conferences. Such action constitutes a failure to comply with the Treaty, which provides that such issues must be addressed through the appropriate legal framework.

The Middle East is marred by both regional and international instability, which is exacerbated by the presence of a non-State party to the Treaty. The 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences called on that State – the only one in the region that remains outside the Treaty – to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to place all its nuclear facilities under the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. This would help maintain international and regional peace and security and would ensure stability and security for all peoples in the region. It is regrettable that the positions adopted by certain parties involved in multilateral frameworks run contrary to the commitments that they themselves have made in that regard.

Mr. President, in recent years, both the security situation and the political situation in the Middle East have taken a turn for the worse. All countries, both in the region and around the world, must work together with determination to address these new challenges and the threats that they pose to regional and international security. If the security of the Middle East and the safety of its peoples are to be maintained, we must first establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region. Egypt continues to take the lead in calling for the realization of this goal and is taking tangible steps to that end. Egypt remains convinced that focus must be placed on “collective security” – rather than “selective security” – in order to achieve peace and security in the Middle East. Such an approach will benefit all States in the region.

The establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East has, gradually and rightly, moved to the forefront of the issues discussed by the NPT review conferences and the Preparatory Committee. As the indefinite extension of the Treaty by the 1995 Review Conference is inextricably linked to the Resolution on the Middle East, which is a key part of the extension agreement, it is essential that the resolution be upheld. Developments in this area and the manner in which they are dealt with have become indicators of the success or failure of the review conferences. It is regrettable that a small number of States chose to thwart the determined efforts of the 2010 Review Conference to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East in calling for a conference on the Middle East to be held in 2012. Owing to the adoption of policies deliberately designed to stall the issue, not only was the Conference not held, but the 2015 Review Conference was prevented from adopting a Final Document, as some States blocked the prevailing consensus on the matter.

It is also inexcusable that, even some 24 years after its adoption, the Resolution on the Middle East has not yet been implemented. Efforts continue to be made to block any practical initiatives or ideas that could lead to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, despite the objective nature of such initiatives, which are developed on the basis of dialogue and consensus.

The Arab Group has been making sincere efforts to put an end to the delay in the implementation of the Resolution on the Middle East, as its continued delay is complicating the work of the NPT review system. In order to ensure the implementation of resolutions adopted by previous review conferences and preserve the credibility of the Treaty and the review conferences, the Arab Group presented a draft resolution to the United Nations General Assembly authorizing the Secretary-General to convene, in 2019, a conference on establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East with a view to adopting a legally binding treaty in that regard. The adoption of the resolution by the international community sent a message regarding its stance on the matter. Egypt hopes to build on that momentum and we call on all States to contribute constructively to the honest and comprehensive process of which this conference will be the start. The conference will serve to strengthen international peace and security, particularly given the clear provisions included in the resolution regarding the principle of consensus

and given the opportunity that the conference will provide for dialogue between all States in the region. I reiterate: the conference will provide an opportunity for all States in the region to hold a dialogue based on the principles of consensus and national sovereignty. All outcomes will be subject to the political will of the States involved and will be consistent with the principle of sovereignty. The only motive for objecting to or boycotting the conference would therefore be the desire to maintain the status quo and protect non-States parties to the Treaty.

Mr. President, Egypt will continue to participate actively and constructively in the Conference on Disarmament. It looks forward to making further contributions during the various meetings on the disarmament agenda for 2019, in particular the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference scheduled to be held in April–May in New York and the conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction scheduled to be held at United Nations Headquarters in November. Egypt hopes that the conference – in which it urges all States in the Middle East to participate – will be the start of a lasting mechanism that will continue to be used until consensus is reached on the issue.

The future of the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery depends on the belief of all States in the objectives of disarmament and their support for those objectives. Greater multilateral international cooperation is required than ever before if we are to overcome the serious challenges facing the international community. If we want to achieve a safer, more peaceful world, we must ensure that the concepts of partnership and collective action triumph over the narrow and limited interests of States. I assure you that Egypt will remain at the forefront of constructive efforts to that end. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Mr. Shoukry for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Shoukry 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 distinguished guest, His Excellency Luwellyn Landers, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa. You have the floor.

Mr. Landers (South Africa): Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for the opportunity to address this august body. I wish to use this occasion to reiterate unambiguously that South Africa is a strong proponent of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control and also an ardent supporter of a world free from the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and proliferation of conventional arms. While the threat to humanity posed by chemical and biological weapons has led to the banning of these weapons of mass destruction through negotiations in this very body, the achievement of a world free from nuclear weapons remains an unfulfilled and elusive goal.

This year marks 10 years since the entry into force of the Pelindaba Treaty, which created our continental nuclear-weapon-free zone and, together with the treaties of Tlatelolco, Bangkok, Rarotonga and Semipalatinsk, it represents an important building block in pursuit of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. As Africans, we are very proud of this achievement.

Almost one year ago I addressed this body and, during that address, I placed emphasis on one of the most significant developments in the area of nuclear disarmament since 1945: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. I once again reiterate that this Treaty represents the highest non-proliferation standard to which any State can commit itself and it provides the opportunity for those States that are not located in nuclear-weapon-free zones to join an instrument that expresses total opposition to nuclear weapons. In this regard, it is with greatest appreciation that I apprise this body that, yesterday, 25 February 2019, South Africa deposited its instrument of ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This renews South Africa's commitment to the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the only guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be

used again by anyone under any circumstances. Fundamentally, nuclear weapons are immoral and unethical and they should not be allowed to exist.

I must reiterate that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is not the final word on nuclear weapons, but a critical step in the evolution of the regime that would be required to achieve and eventually maintain a world without nuclear weapons. Its approach is consistent with the approach taken in the elimination of other unacceptable weapons, where prohibition preceded elimination. The Treaty is fully consistent with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and endeavours to contribute towards fulfilling the provisions of that Treaty, including the obligation under its article 6 to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. Importantly, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons does not prioritize the security interests of one or a few States above the security interests of the international community as a whole, but rather recognizes that nuclear weapons pose a threat to all States and to humankind. Neither the possession nor the pursuit of nuclear weapons can enhance international peace and security.

As we prepare for the 2020 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is imperative that we take stock of the progress made towards the implementation of all Treaty provisions and the solemn commitment made in this regard. We should guard against the eventuality that some States opposed to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons use this matter to distract our attention from an objective assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences.

South Africa has a principled belief that international peace and security cannot be divorced from development – that global security is not achievable when enormous financial and other resources continue to be diverted towards the acquisition of more and greater destructive capabilities, while more than a billion people around the world continue to suffer from hunger and deprivation. We believe that common threats can only be effectively addressed through enhanced international cooperation and strong international institutions that can respond to our collective security concerns.

The present session of the Conference on Disarmament is taking place against the backdrop of a number of challenges that have affected international disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts during the last few years. As member States gather here in this Conference on Disarmament, bound by our collective commitment to advance substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament, there are many reasons for us to be very worried, but today I will only touch upon three of those.

We should indeed be concerned that there are still nearly 15,000 nuclear warheads in existence today with huge implications and risks, in terms not only of humanitarian consequences, but also of the environmental disaster that would befall humanity in the event of a nuclear detonation by design or by accident.

We should also be apprehensive that the future of decades-old arms control instruments such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the New START Treaty, which will come to an end in 2021, are in jeopardy, with the opening up of a dangerous path towards a renewed nuclear arms race, unprecedented since the 1970s. It is also worrying that international agreements concluded in the interests of peacebuilding are being undermined. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme, concluded in Vienna on 14 July 2015, was achieved through negotiations between Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was achieved through dialogue and not through the use of force, which is illegal under international law, or through the imposition of unilateral sanctions or unilateral demands.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that some nuclear weapon States continue to invest billions of dollars in the modernization of nuclear arsenals and their means of delivery, bringing us ever so close to the nuclear precipice. In a world where basic humanitarian needs have not been met, the billions of dollars allocated to the modernization

of nuclear weapons could instead be directed towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to give just one example.

The continuing deadlock and inability of the Conference on Disarmament to deliver on its responsibility as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community is of immense concern. We regret that discussions this year on a programme of work have once again not been successful and that discussions have now reverted to the consideration of dated alternatives, such as subsidiary bodies, as was the case in 2018. We note that past repetitive activities have not brought the Conference any closer to an agreement on a programme of work. Nevertheless, it is our hope that any decision taken this year will not distract the Conference on Disarmament from the imperative of reaching consensus on a programme of work and starting negotiations. We have no doubt that this will require increased flexibility by all Conference on Disarmament members and a willingness to move beyond narrow interests.

In South Africa's view, there are several items on the Conference's agenda that are ready for negotiation, including a fissile material treaty, a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and also other effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. The discussions in and reports of the groups of governmental experts on these issues have displayed a positive inclination to negotiations. There is therefore no reason why any or all of these issues cannot be subjected to negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament, in particular given the complexities of each of these areas, which may take time to resolve. We do not believe that the conclusion of such instruments could in any way jeopardize the national security interests of any State. To the contrary, new norms in these areas can only serve to strengthen international and regional peace and security. In addition, the mere act of negotiation can also help to rebuild trust among States, something that is desperately needed.

The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons must spur disarmament efforts and make any use of nuclear weapons unthinkable. The credibility of multilateral bodies and the sanctity of agreements and commitments arising from multilateral processes must be respected and protected to preserve the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. While the primary responsibility for undertaking the necessary steps for the elimination of nuclear weapons lies with the nuclear-weapon States, we must all play our part in pursuit of our common goal. It is therefore incumbent upon all States to engage, without further delay, in an accelerated process of negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

The President: I thank Mr. Landers for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Landers 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 distinguished guest, His Excellency Dato' Saiffudin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Abdullah (Malaysia): Let me at the outset congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at the beginning of its 2019 session. I would also like to recall Malaysia's gratitude to Mr. Møller, Director General of the United Nations Office in Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, for his instrumental role in facilitating the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Malaysia's unwavering commitment to international peace and security, global disarmament and non-proliferation and, in particular, to the common goal of a world free of nuclear weapons underpins our membership in the Conference on Disarmament.

Malaysia became a member of the Conference at the time that this forum had finalized the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the second of the only two disarmament treaties that this forum has concluded. That, however, is now almost 24 years ago and the Conference has since been in a stalemate for more than two decades. Such is the state of the Conference on Disarmament upon which we, as its members, and the international community at large have been reflecting. The Treaty has yet to enter into force.

Malaysia continues to call for the entry into force of this Treaty without further delay and for an end to nuclear weapons tests.

It is also regrettable that there is still no progress with the other multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation framework, namely the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Humankind and our world continue to be confronted with clear and growing threats and risks of nuclear conflagration with catastrophic consequences, regardless whether these are due to deliberate acts of nuclear war or to military incidents. Some 15,000 nuclear arms exist in different parts of the world. Nuclear arsenals are constantly being modernized and adapted according to the strategic defence doctrines of the States which possess them. Malaysia firmly believes that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only solution guarding against the possible use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Greater political will and more definite actions are urgently required to achieve this goal.

All the commitments and obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty should be effectively pursued and implemented to end not only the horizontal but also the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons. The obligation under article VI, which has been legally reinforced by the International Court of Justice in 1996, must therefore continue to be accorded the highest priority and be pursued in earnest. Indeed, the Treaty has been a cornerstone in the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Malaysia is honoured to have been given the mandate to chair the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference, which is scheduled to take place in New York from 29 April to 10 May 2019. As chair of the third session of the Preparatory Committee, Malaysia will work closely with States parties to the Treaty and other stakeholders to create positive momentum during the current Treaty review cycle. With active and constructive support from all concerned, Malaysia will strive to ensure that there is a substantive recommendation in 2019, opening up greater prospects for success during the 2020 Review Conference.

It is in the context of Malaysia's long-standing and principled commitment to the common goal of a world without nuclear weapons that we signed the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Malaysia also welcomes the Secretary-General's Disarmament Agenda and we hope it can reinvigorate multilateral disarmament effort, and guide the work of this forum.

As the Conference on Disarmament enters its fortieth year, it is imperative that this forum be reactivated to overcome the impasse of the past 23 or 24 years. Malaysia welcomes the recent initiatives, in particular the establishment of the Conference's subsidiary bodies, to advance its work. The deliberations have been valuable in creating renewed momentum and clarity of positions and priorities. Without doubt, greater political will and flexibility are required to move the work of this forum forward. It is also time for the membership of the Conference on Disarmament to be expanded to ensure greater engagement, reflecting collective efforts on the global disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. Let us be resolute in fulfilling our collective obligations, honouring our commitments and striving for progress through cooperative multilateralism in the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank Mr. Abdullah for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Abdullah 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 distinguished guest, His Excellency Audun Halvorsen, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Halvorsen (Norway): Excellencies, distinguished delegates, on Friday this week we will be celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of one of the most successful multilateral disarmament treaties of recent times: the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention. Norway is proud to be presiding over the Anti-Personnel Landmine

Convention this year and we look forward to welcoming delegates to the fourth session of the Convention's Review Conference in Oslo in November.

Landmines are indiscriminate by nature. They continue to kill and injure long after a conflict has ended. In the past 20 years, the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention has become binding international law for 164 States parties. More important, the Convention has established a strong norm against any use of landmines. This norm is adhered to by many more States than just the States parties. Put simply, thanks to the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention, landmines are now a weapon that no longer has a place in our international order.

The twentieth anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention presents an important opportunity to recall what can be achieved through multilateral disarmament negotiations. The success of the Convention should be measured in the number of mines destroyed, the amount of land freed from their deadly bondage, and the number of victims and survivors who have increased hope that their needs will be met and their rights respected. On this count too, we have much to celebrate.

Over the past 20 years, more than 51 million stockpiled landmines have been destroyed. Each landmine destroyed represents a potential life or limb saved. As long as landmines are in the ground, they continue to kill and maim. It is therefore well worth celebrating that 31 States have successfully finished clearance and been declared landmine-free. This means that communities can again use these areas without fear and that development and economic activity is no longer hampered by the deadly legacy of landmines. We still have more work to do, however. Thirty-two States parties still have landmine contamination and clearance obligations in line with the Convention. If we are to reach our ambition of a mine-free world by 2025, we must increase the pace of survey and clearance worldwide. When all landmines have been cleared and all stockpiles have been destroyed, landmine victims and survivors will still have to live with the legacy of landmines for the rest of their lives.

This Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention broke new ground as the first disarmament treaty to recognize the rights of landmine survivors. This recognition has served as an inspiration for other conventions in their endeavours to meet the needs and ensure the rights of victims and indeed has served to highlight the rights of persons living with disabilities in general.

At the same time, challenges remain. In 2017, landmines and explosive remnants of war caused more than 7,000 registered deaths and injuries. Landmines are sadly not a problem of the past. Over the past few years, improvised landmines have again been used as tools of war, mostly by armed non-State actors. While improvised landmines themselves are not a new concept, the scale of the problem is. Anti-personnel landmines that meet the definition in the Convention are prohibited and fall under the obligations of the Convention, independent of whether they are manufactured or improvised. New use of landmines and the rising number of casualties reminds us that it was precisely concerns about the indiscriminate impact of landmines that brought the Convention into existence in the first place. Many established norms are currently under pressure. It should be our duty to protect them and to address new challenges.

Norway has been a consistent partner in mine action for more than 25 years. Humanitarian mine action continues to be a priority for our government. We aim to use our presidency of the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention to bring renewed political attention to mine action and to highlight how the Convention is a key protection instrument. We believe the objectives of the Convention – to save lives, protect civilians, assist victims and to enable sustainable development in affected areas – are as relevant as ever.

Allow me now to take this opportunity to address other important disarmament and arms control issues. When, at its special session on disarmament in 1978, the General Assembly designed the disarmament machinery, it pointed to the Conference on Disarmament as the forum for negotiations. Sadly, for more than 20 years now, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to fulfil its mandate. Last year's establishment of the subsidiary bodies was, however, a step in the right direction and in the

future, we might consider more creative ways to make use of the Conference on Disarmament.

The current international environment appears not conducive to making progress in nuclear disarmament. Measures to build confidence are needed. Successful arms control policies must be in line with realities. The fundamental norm against the use of weapons of mass destruction is under pressure. Chemical weapons have been used in Syria, Iraq, the United Kingdom and Malaysia. Those responsible for such use must be held accountable. This is why the decision on attribution taken by the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention at its special session in June 2018 is so important. We offer our full support to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons as it seeks to implement this decision.

Norway is fully committed to the objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. To achieve this, we need a comprehensive arms control agenda with mutually supportive building blocks. Our common goal can only be achieved through balanced, mutual, irreversible and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is the cornerstone of our common efforts on disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and applications and it must remain so.

Norway is working for the full implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and calls for continued global commitment to that Treaty. A forward-looking agenda for the 2020 Review Conference covering all three pillars is needed. This should include: first, developing credible multilateral solutions to verify future nuclear disarmament. The Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament is currently at work here in Geneva. The Group is the only international forum in which nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States sit at the same table to discuss, on defined terms, how to advance nuclear disarmament. In this respect, the process also facilitates confidence-building.

Second, the agenda should include the strengthening of the global norm against nuclear testing by calling for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the promotion of negotiations on, and the adoption of, a fissile material cut-off treaty. Establishing baseline declarations on fissile materials and developing reporting mechanisms within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would be tangible steps on the path towards such a treaty.

Third, the agenda should include strengthening non-proliferation efforts by promoting universal adherence to the IAEA comprehensive safeguards agreement and its additional protocol – the global safeguards standard. Moreover, we should make the most out of peaceful applications of nuclear technologies to assist efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Norway supports measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons being used, such as steps to improve early warning systems and to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons. We promote increased transparency by nuclear-weapon States and the strengthening of negative security assurances towards non-nuclear-weapon States. Moreover, we should address systems not covered by existing multilateral arms control agreements, such as substrategic nuclear weapons. This is especially important at a time when the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is failing. This Treaty has significantly contributed to stability in Europe for more than 30 years. We regret that Russia has not taken steps to return to compliance with the Treaty, but rather made unreasonable counter-accusations. International treaties cannot be upheld over time if only one party complies. We urge Russia to return to full and verifiable compliance to preserve the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

I would also like to express my hope that the United States and Russia will work towards renewing the New START Treaty when it expires. The nuclear and missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remain a grave and unacceptable concern. We welcome the summits and dialogue with North Korea. At the same time, we stand firmly behind the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Norway contributed substantively to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and remains committed to Security Council resolution 2231 (2015). The decision by the United States to withdraw has made the agreement vulnerable. We call on Iran to continue its full cooperation with IAEA.

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is another vital pillar of the global disarmament architecture. We must improve response and preparedness, address relevant developments in life sciences, tackle emerging challenges, and improve cooperation and assistance under the Convention.

Lastly, building confidence is a key priority. Understanding concepts of strategic stability and deterrence is key. Our goal is an agenda of arms control that makes us all more safe and secure.

The President: I thank Mr. Halvorsen for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Halvorsen 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 distinguished guest, His Excellency Mohammed Ali Al-Hakim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq. The floor is yours, Sir.

Mr. Al-Hakim (Iraq): Good afternoon everyone, thank you Mr. President for inviting me to address the Conference. I will speak in Arabic.

(spoke in Arabic)

Thank you for your kind welcome, Mr. President. I am honoured to be here in this international forum as a confirmation of the importance that the Republic of Iraq places on the Conference and its commitment to multilateralism. The Conference strengthens the credibility of the international community's collective commitment to nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq knows full well that arms races do not lead to peace or security; on the contrary, they are a major source of tension and instability. Iraq remains committed to all disarmament and non-proliferation instruments out of the belief that the universal accession to treaties on weapons of mass destruction, their non-discriminatory and universal implementation and the complete elimination of such weapons are essential in order to bolster global peace and stability and provide the international community with genuine guarantees against the use, or the threat of use, of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. President, the role of the Conference is growing ever more important in the light of the rise in regional crises and political tensions in the international environment, the presence of terrorist threats and the increasing danger posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, all of which undermine international and regional stability. As the Conference is yet to break its stalemate, disarmament matters are now being discussed in other forums. *(spoke in English)*

I think this is a very important issue, really and truly. I have served in this chamber for three years and I understand the value of multilateral diplomacy. This is a very important body, which we should preserve. Iraq is one of those countries that has always aligned itself with the international community to make sure that this international body continues to work multilaterally.

(spoke in Arabic)

It is therefore essential that we demonstrate the necessary political willpower and that we redouble our efforts to achieve a comprehensive, balanced programme of work.

(spoke in English)

We were very close to obtaining a programme of work. I believe that the Conference is capable of producing a good programme of work that is agreeable to all parties.

(spoke in Arabic)

Such a programme is necessary if we are to make progress towards our disarmament and non-proliferation goals.

Mr. President, like many other countries, Iraq believes that the Conference must continue to place the highest priority on preventing nuclear proliferation, especially in the light of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament held in 1978 and the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in 1996.

Mr. President, I would like to convey my country's views on the main items of the Committee's agenda, in particular the four issues concerning the programme of work.

First, as technological developments in the field of nuclear weapons will only make the continued existence of such weapons all the more dangerous, Iraq supports all efforts and negotiations among the nuclear-weapon States with the aim of radically reducing the number of nuclear weapons that they possess and, ultimately, ridding the world of such weapons. Iraq believes that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones will help strengthen nuclear disarmament efforts.

Second, with regard to negative security assurances, we must agree to develop an international legally binding instrument pursuant to which the nuclear-weapon States must make unconditional guarantees to the non-nuclear-weapon States that they will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons. Although negative security assurances are one response to the legitimate and fair demands of non-nuclear-weapon States – which chose to voluntarily relinquish all nuclear military options upon becoming parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – they should not be considered an alternative to the ultimate goal of complete nuclear disarmament.

Third, as the continued production of fissile material poses an obstacle to achieving the objectives of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, Iraq supports the idea of granting the Conference a mandate to negotiate an effective, non-discriminatory and internationally applicable multilateral treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Fourth, like many other countries, Iraq believes that, as space belongs to all humankind, space exploration should be exclusively peaceful in nature. The militarization of space will lead to a costly, destructive arms race, which must not be allowed to happen. The Conference should consider adopting an international instrument banning the weaponization of outer space and supporting all international initiatives aimed at strengthening the peaceful uses of outer space.

Mr. President, I would like to reiterate my country's support for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones around the world, as this is an important first step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. We call on the international community to implement the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, in line with the action plan set out in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference, as this resolution is key to establishing such zones. Iraq remains disappointed that the 2015 Review Conference failed to produce a Final Document. *(spoke in English)*

As a matter of fact, I was in New York and we were extremely disappointed that the 2015 Review Conference produced no results, even after long negotiations had been held between the Member States. We would like the next conference to return to the 2010 document, which we thought at the time was a very good document.

(spoke in Arabic)

General Assembly resolution 73/28 on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East is based on the general principles behind the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. It was adopted by consensus and does not discriminate against any party in the region. The related treaties were also adopted by consensus and received the support of all States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The States that sponsored the Resolution on the Middle East, as States parties to the Treaty, *(spoke in English)* – which includes your country, Mr. President – *(spoke in Arabic)* must uphold the promises and commitments that they made to establish a nuclear-weapon-

free zone in the Middle East and to implement the resolution. The conference planned for 2019 is an important step forward, the aim of which is to prevent any negative trends that could affect the 2020 Review Conference.

Iraq welcomes the ongoing negotiations between the United States of America and North Korea, which will hopefully lead to a reduction in tensions in that sensitive part of the world and, ultimately, to the end of the entire North Korean nuclear programme, which would benefit States in the region and around the globe.

Finally, Mr. President, I wish to take this opportunity to express my highest appreciation for the efforts that the presidents of the Conference have made this year to return the Conference to its true role of addressing non-proliferation and disarmament matters. You can count on the support of Iraq, as a member of the Conference. We wish you and all future presidents success in the role. Thank you.

The President: I thank Mr. Al-Hakim, for his statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Al-Hakim from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to invite His Excellency Ambassador Azeez of Sri Lanka to address the Conference. The floor is yours, Sir.

Mr. Azeez (Sri Lanka): Thank you, Mr. President. It is indeed an honour to join the distinguished speakers who have addressed the high-level segment yesterday and today. These speakers, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, have spoken so eloquently, drawing our attention to the importance of making swift progress in the critical area of disarmament.

The security landscape in most regions, and globally in general, is becoming increasingly constrained by the day. It is time to reflect on some of the trends and developments in the international security landscape and to seek to persuade the parties or forces that shape them to take all possible steps in the direction of assuring and in strengthening international peace and security. We say this in good faith.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is in jeopardy. We would encourage dialogue between the States concerned on the issue of intermediate-range nuclear forces. We also support the call made by the Secretary-General to extend the New START Treaty for another term, once it expires. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was welcomed by a large number of countries when it was concluded in 2015. We note the importance of continuity on the Plan by all its current parties and the crucial role played by the International Atomic Energy Agency in verification.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was the last treaty negotiated by the Conference on Disarmament, has come a long way in achieving near universality but remains still short of essential ratifications to come into effect. We appreciate the work of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and that of its Executive Secretary, for the innovative ways in which they use the treaty provisions to benefit humanity in the vital areas of its mandate.

The use or threat of use of other types of weapons of mass destruction still remains a possibility. The perception being created that there is less likelihood of nuclear weapons being used than of other weapon of mass destruction is precisely that: a perception. It seems evident that confidence among non-nuclear-weapon States in the continued wisdom of non-use or in the ability of restrain is steadily eroding.

The evolving prospect of lethal autonomous weapons systems, with the advances made in artificial intelligence towards the domination of the regional and global security landscape in a manner devoid of meaningful human control remains a matter of grave concern. The implications of such weapons systems for human rights and international humanitarian law are far-reaching. While several regions have their own nuclear weapon-free zone and are taking responsible measures to ensure that interregional peace and security hold despite all the challenges, such arrangements appear, however, to be a luxury enjoyed by just a few. Now the concept has expanded even to include all other weapons of

mass destruction. The package of agreements of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains unimplemented in most of its areas, one of the most glaring of which is the lack of commitment to move forward towards negotiating a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East. A number of other challenges that have the potential to place humanity at peril still remain and are too numerous to be recounted here.

It is against the backdrop of this constraining global landscape that we have stepped into the year 2019. This, however, is an anniversary year for several landmark events in the global disarmament discourse, including 100 years of multilateralism in Geneva, the fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament, the final session of the Preparatory Commission of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the twentieth anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention. We believe that there are other landmarks too, directly or indirectly connected to the disarmament and non-proliferation discourse. Some lie in the human rights arena, in particular the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which we consider have relevance for the assurance of human security in all its aspects.

The picture is not entirely bleak, however, as several speakers have pointed out in this forum yesterday and today. On this point, we share the hope expressed by the Secretary-General yesterday, to the effect that we should build on the positives and work harder on narrowing the persisting differences, in the common interest of humankind. Having faced a continuing impasse for over 20 years, the Conference on Disarmament received a temporary impetus last year, through its decisions 2119 and 2126, which opened up an opportunity to break the stalemate and move forward. Substantive deliberations followed. Nevertheless, a major step forward has yet to be taken towards a programme of work agreeable to all. The fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament is the right opportunity, if used wisely, to build on the momentum achieved through the productive work last year, to develop an understanding of commonalities and, in parallel, to move forward towards the negotiation of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work.

From Sri Lanka's perspective, the launching of "Securing our Common Future: an Agenda for Disarmament" by the Secretary-General in Geneva in May 2018 marked a significant step forward. It called for a breakthrough in the current impasse and aimed to create forward momentum in the disarmament agenda through practical suggestions and ideas. There was great expectation that it would help bring the global focus back on disarmament in all its aspects and put in place sustained, effective and meaningful processes to advance disarmament.

We are encouraged that several countries have taken ideas from the disarmament agenda and have introduced or are introducing specific multilateral initiatives. We hope that they are doing so in a belief in the intrinsic value of such initiatives, as the world is beset by a number of challenges, including new and emerging challenges.

While we note this positive approach, it is unfortunate, however, that some countries should have interpreted this Agenda for Disarmament only from the perspective of their own strategic priorities, rather than seeing how best the ideas which it contains could cohere into shaping the policy and legal architecture for advancing disarmament non-proliferation in a much more forward-looking manner. We should endeavour to use the ideas to construct our collective approach for a better and safer world and we should refrain from seeking to reduce the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament to an anthology of selective quotations to suit the specific point that one or the other party wishes to maintain in the disarmament discourse.

Much as we are pleased with the positive developments, we are equally worried about the possibility of some critical ideas being neglected. While some ideas are taken from the Agenda for Disarmament in good faith, for transformation into multilateral initiatives, other ideas that the Agenda has suggested with a view to bridging the divides on certain vital concerns still remain unpicked. We have a fear, therefore, that, even though it does not amount to cherry-picking, the current emphasis is on picking the pickables and

leaving out the rest may, in one way or the other, perpetuate the imbalance that currently exists.

Considering the current precarious state of the international peace and security landscape, the significance of the year 2019 in the global disarmament calendar and, in particular, as we advance towards the 2020 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is imperative that the Conference on Disarmament explores all means possible to create momentum for serious and committed negotiations on all core issues. In this regard, we note with appreciation the efforts being made to seek the support of the Conference's membership to evolve a draft decision under your presidency that would pave the way, we hope, for substantial informal negotiations through subsidiary mechanisms, broadly on the lines of the decision adapted during Sri Lanka's presidency last year, and building further on it and further narrowing the gaps in our understanding.

If swift progress is not achieved in the common interest of humanity towards engaging in substantive negotiations sooner, aimed at putting in place binding international instruments on disarmament and non-proliferation, the gains of multilateralism and its achievements in peace, security and social and economic development for all, would no doubt run the risk of being rolled back or negated for a long time to come.

We believe in enabling or permissive mechanisms, along with mandates and procedures that yield outcomes. We consider that working mandates and rules of procedures are there only to aid, not prevent, preliminary deliberations on substantive issues. Deliberations should in turn aid negotiations. As the single disarmament negotiating forum, it is important that the Conference on Disarmament is harnessed to better deliver on its core mandates and to take forward negotiations on all critical concerns.

We also believe that it is important for the Conference on Disarmament to be sufficiently inclusive and representative of the whole range of views and perspectives expressed on critical issues in disarmament and non-proliferation. In this respect, we reiterate two factors that are essential to infuse fresh thinking and initiative, namely, addressing the acute need for education and training in the disarmament and non-proliferation arena and ensuring the full integration of a gender perspective in disarmament and non-proliferation discourses. We wish to urge the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and all member States to strengthen their work in these areas, which are so crucial to empowering the younger generation in the area of disarmament, in particular in the developing world.

Within the parameters of our national approach to international peace and security, the following priorities remain among those of particular importance in the disarmament arena. We stand for comprehensive disarmament, realized through a step-by-step approach underpinned by the adoption of legally binding frameworks and also addressing legal gaps that may exist. We attach priority to full compliance with, and effective promotion of, the implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty without further delay and respect for its three pillars and a delicate balance built into the structure of the Treaty in favour of eventually achieving nuclear disarmament. We support the preservation of all existing disarmament architecture and the positive gains realized. We continue to remain committed to achieving a legally binding instrument on prevention of an arms race in outer space, as a country which, within the United Nations system, has steadfastly pursued the objective of an outer space free of weapons. We advance and promote respect for objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention and continue to call for their effective and non-discriminatory implementation. We strongly support and call for the effective implementation of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. We call for practical steps towards establishing zones free of weapons of mass destruction, building on the nuclear-free zones that already exist and, in particular, in the regions where such zones are not in place, as confidence-building initiatives. We express our commitment to, and call for negotiation on, a legally binding instrument on negative security assurances.

The list is not exhaustive and the remaining set of priorities includes the identification of, deliberations and negotiation on new and emerging issues, including lethal autonomous weapons systems.

We are living in an increasingly interconnected and interlinked world. There are direct links between development and security; security and human rights; and human rights and development. Lack of movement in these critical areas will severely impede progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Development with many of the Sustainable Development Goals likely to fall behind their targets and many others to slip into further regression. Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions and Goal 17 on partnership for goals, in particular, are of paramount importance in this context, if we are leave no one behind.

The lead-up to 2020 is an important and critical period not only for the international landmark that I mentioned, but also because it provides an opportunity to take realistic stock of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and their review by the General Assembly in 2020. Peace and security that underpin and form a basis for sustainable development and human rights are key determinants of the progress that humanity makes in all spheres, including economic and social development.

Mr. President, on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, let me express our sincere wish that the proposal that is currently before this Conference, delicately worked on by you and your team, would no doubt take us closer to the path of achieving sustained global peace and security through disarmament and non-proliferation. We would like to assure you and, through you, all other delegations present here that Sri Lanka remains ready and willing to support all efforts that you and other members collectively make towards generating and achieving consensus within the Conference on Disarmament and working towards realizing its true objectives.

The President: I thank Ambassador Azeez for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the presidency. Is there any other delegation who would like to take the floor at this time? That does not seem to be the case. In that case, that concludes our business for this afternoon. The next meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.