

Conference on Disarmament

English

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


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 5 March 2019, at 10.10 a.m.

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

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The President: I call to order the 1491st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Distinguished colleagues, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, as announced this morning, we will continue discussion of the draft decision set out in document CD/WP.619. Our meeting this morning will need to finish by about 12.15 p.m., because of the talk being held in the library events room in Building B, entitled “Milestones in the history of disarmament in Geneva”, which begins at 12.30 p.m. and to which all are warmly invited.

Before taking up the discussion on the draft decision, I would like the Conference to consider two more requests to participate in the work of the Conference as observers, received at 3 p.m. yesterday, Monday 4 March 2019. These requests may be found in document CD/WP.617/Add.4, available on your tables. Any further requests from non-member States received after this date will be presented for your consideration and decision at future plenary meetings.

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

It was so decided.

The President: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, before we proceed any further I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our new colleague, who has assumed her responsibilities as the representative of her Government to the Conference on Disarmament, Her Excellency Adriana del Rosario Mendoza Agudelo, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations in Geneva. On behalf of my own Government and on behalf of the Conference I would like to take this opportunity to assure you of our full cooperation and support in your new assignment.

I would like now to give Ambassador Mendoza Agudelo the floor.

Ms. Mendoza Agudelo (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin my statement by thanking you for your kind welcome. Colombia attaches great importance to the Conference on Disarmament as a forum and is deeply honoured to participate in it. I would like to assure you of my own and my delegation’s full support for the success of your tenure.

Colombia considers the international regime for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, and the framework supporting it, to be as important and as relevant as ever and, for this reason, is committed to strengthening them on an ongoing basis.

While we are aware of the differences in opinion that exist in the Conference, we firmly believe in the importance of multilateralism, which we consider to be our best option for achieving nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The fact that this forum has continued to function for the last 40 years is a testament to the commitment of all delegations to the principles and goals that we share. The time has come to harness that commitment and to restart discussions on effective measures related to the items on our agenda.

The current impasse in the work of the Conference on Disarmament is unwarranted and unsustainable. The international community has a duty to resume a constructive dialogue that will translate into feasible mandates, which will, in turn, serve to strengthen international peace and security.

In this, my first address to the Conference on Disarmament, allow me to briefly remind you of the long-standing positions that Colombia has maintained in recent years and that will continue to guide its work in this forum.

We are in favour of general and complete disarmament, advocate the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones to help foster international peace and security, and support nuclear non-proliferation initiatives. We also believe it is important to forge synergies and launch complementary processes in these areas, bearing in mind our shared goal of freeing the world from the danger that the possession, threat and use of nuclear weapons poses to humankind.

Colombia supports the negotiation and entry into force of a non-discriminatory, multilateral and effectively verifiable international treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosives.

Colombia believes that outer space should be explored only for peaceful purposes so as to prevent an arms race from taking place. Outer space must be kept safe, secure, stable, sustainable and conflict-free. Colombia supports the establishment of trust-building measures, the development of standards of responsible behaviour for outer-space activities and the making of unilateral commitments to not become the first country to place weapons in outer space.

Negative security assurances are one of the international goals of disarmament and non-proliferation, especially since any nuclear attack on a State that does not have a similar response capacity is strategically and morally unacceptable.

Turning to procedural issues, my delegation believes that it is important to expand the membership of the Conference to ensure that more States Members of the United Nations are represented. Although Colombia supports decision-making by consensus, it maintains that the procedure must not be abused. No country should use the consensus mechanism to veto decisions.

Mr. President, before I conclude my statement, allow me to comment briefly on the draft decision set out in document CD/WP.619. Although we would rather be discussing a programme of work, we are aware of the current situation in the Conference and are grateful for your proposal, which will allow us to continue discussing substantive issues in a more flexible format.

Colombia hopes that, if this decision is approved, it will yield tangible results, whereby it will be possible for us, at the 2020 session, to agree on a programme of work that will allow treaties on the core issues falling within the remit of the Conference to be negotiated. Regarding the proposal to set up subsidiary bodies, the prospect of there being as many as 40 meetings poses a serious challenge for smaller missions. Nevertheless, if those meetings are actually going to allow us to move forward with our thematic discussions and produce results that we can build on in the future, we would support the proposal. Those results must be reflected in the coordinators' reports, whose nature and expected format, and the related approval process, we hope will be clearly set out in the final decision.

My delegation will continue to play an active role in this endeavour and we look forward to seeing your revised draft decision, which we are sure will reflect the comments made by delegations over the past week. The commitment and flexibility of States parties are the main factors that will determine whether the Conference can restart its substantive work in the coming weeks.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Colombia for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues, I would now like to turn to further discussion of the draft proposal set out in document CD/WP.619. I would like to thank delegations for the comments and suggestions that they have expressed thus far on our proposal, whether in last week's plenary meetings, in written form or in bilateral consultations. This morning I would like to update you on those consultations and to set out the next steps.

Overall, I have been very encouraged by the response from delegations, which suggests that there is broad support for our proposal as a sensible way of structuring our work this year. I have also listened carefully to the constructive comments that we have received. As I see it, there are three main issues to reflect on as we refine our proposal.

First, the subject matter of the subsidiary bodies needs to be more clearly linked to the agenda of the Conference and the balance between their mandates improved. Second, the reporting mechanism needs further precision and clarification. Third, the role and mandate of the special coordinators needs further work.

Taking into account any additional comments and proposals this morning, I intend to circulate a revised version of the draft decision by tomorrow morning, through the secretariat, which will reflect these main points.

On the first issue, that of the subsidiary body mandates, I propose to specify the agenda items under which the mandate of each subsidiary body falls. The revised draft will also attempt to improve the balance between the mandates, while maintaining the forward momentum from last year's work.

On the second issue, I propose to clarify the reporting procedure. The objective remains to ensure that there is a proper record of the detail of the subsidiary bodies' discussions that can serve as a basis for future year's work and that any emerging consensus on the way forward is captured, but in a way that leaves as little room as possible for procedural ambiguity.

On the third issue, that of special coordinators, I propose to retain the structure presented in the first draft, but to provide further clarification of the mandate of the special coordinators and more precise direction as to how they are to carry out their work. While some delegations have expressed a wish to convert the role of special coordinator for emerging issues and new technologies into a full subsidiary body, I continue to feel that this role is best performed in a more flexible way. This is partly because the issues at hand are cross-cutting and affect all the agenda items of the Conference, and partly because, as many delegations have pointed out, the workload for delegations in covering four full subsidiary bodies is already significant.

As regards the other mandate referred to in the first draft, for special coordinators on the working methods and the expansion of the membership of the Conference, I am grateful to those delegations which have proposed looking back at earlier models to see how these issues have been treated. It seems to me that the mandate might best be expressed in a more traditional way, using such phrasing as the improved and effective functioning of the Conference, which is already one of the headings in our annual report and which was used when the Conference last appointed a special coordinator for these issues in 2002.

In the fortieth anniversary year of the Conference, 17 years since this issue was last formally examined by the Conference, there does seem to be no time like the present to take a dispassionate look once again at the way in which we work.

There are of course several other comments that have been made which have been helpful to us in further refining the text and which will be reflected in the revised draft. I would now welcome further comments from delegations, either in our current formal setting or, if delegations so prefer, in an informal mode.

I would now like to turn to the list of speakers who have requested the floor: the first on the list is the distinguished Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes the important work done by the President of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Aidan Liddle of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with a view to the adoption of a draft decision on this year's session. We appreciate the excellent leadership of the President and his delegation during the plenary meetings and the high-level segment of the Conference, which was held last week.

In this unprecedented highly politicized atmosphere, we need to build a climate of trust among the member States that will facilitate discussions on the programme of work and the substantive agenda items.

As we have repeatedly stated, our country supports the immediate commencement or resumption of negotiations on legally binding documents linked to the four substantive agenda items of the Conference. The Conference has a negotiating mandate that cannot be fulfilled through lengthy deliberations that yield no tangible results. We believe that the establishment of subsidiary bodies could help to overcome the current politicization of the Conference. Moreover, we consider that the deadlock in the work of the Conference is

highly undesirable and that the subsidiary bodies might generate the ideas needed to facilitate the resumption of negotiations.

Mr. President, my delegation considers that the draft decision you originally submitted is a good effort. We believe, however, that it can be improved. Notwithstanding the comments that you have already made, we look forward to receiving the revised version of the draft decision, which will be sent to our capital for study.

Against that background, we would like to offer some preliminary remarks. The reports of the subsidiary bodies that were adopted in September 2018 are certainly a substantial source of inspiration for the future work of the Conference, and we appreciate the fact that the draft decision takes them into account. However, in some instances the reports adopted in 2018 highlighted the existence of divergences on substantive aspects, while not all of them effectively identified areas for future work. Certainly, not all the topics have been developed to the same level, so we must make sure that we give due importance to all of the core issues addressed by the subsidiary bodies.

We think that the aims proposed in operative paragraph 2 of the draft decision might be a summary of the objectives of the subsidiary bodies described in operative paragraph 1. Furthermore, considering that the draft decision proposes 10 meetings per subsidiary body, it would be useful to know in advance the timetable of activities that would allow 40 meetings to be held in a period of approximately 2 months.

We regret that the draft decision does not provide for the establishment of a subsidiary body on emerging issues and new technologies. As to the coordinators for the subsidiary bodies, we consider that, notwithstanding the excellent and professional work done by the ambassadors who coordinated the subsidiary bodies last year, it would be appropriate to appoint coordinators by rotation. With regard to the appointment of special coordinators, we do not know what meeting or consultation mechanism they will use to set criteria for addressing the topics for which they are responsible. We need to know how they will ensure that their consultations are inclusive, transparent and universal. This is another reason for knowing the timetable of work in advance.

As to the special coordinators on the methods of work of the Conference and the expansion of its membership, we understand that the methods of work in question are the rules of procedure governing the established practices of the Conference, which must be respected. We are confident that the expansion of the membership could deliver added value by providing the Conference with new impetus and new ideas.

However, we are concerned about the possible review of the working methods, including the rules of procedure. It is widely known that some delegations want a review in order to avoid keeping the criterion of rotation of the presidency. We would caution that, if this should occur, it would violate fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations, such as the legal equality of States. Apart from that, it would politicize the Conference in the extreme. We believe that the impasse in the Conference is not directly connected with a potential flaw in its methods of work, but with the lack of political will from some States to adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that resumes the Conference's negotiating mandate. This may be seen from the fact that, in 2001 the Conference took the decision, contained in the official document CD/1646, to establish Special Coordinators on the Review of its Agenda, the Expansion of its Membership and its Improved and Effective Functioning, but to no avail.

In this context, we would prefer not to make the discussion of substantive matters conditional on the discussion of procedural matters. That would only contribute to entrenching the stalemate in the Conference.

We therefore recommend that the decision should be split into two parts: one on the re-establishment of the subsidiary bodies, and another on the special coordinators. And as to the selection of coordinators of subsidiary bodies and special coordinators, we request clarification as to how the regional groups will make this selection. We hope, Mr. President, that you can provide us with this information in due course.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I recognize the distinguished Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you very much, Mr. President. As we have heard over the last two weeks or so, some delegations are quite reluctant even to engage in a mere discussion of the issues of membership and working methods. Many in this room have repeatedly spoken of the importance of adhering to the rules of procedure and I agree with that. I would, however, remind delegates that, under the rules of procedure, this body is mandated periodically to review its membership.

For my delegation, the issue of working methods is an important topic for discussion in this body. Once again I do not understand why there should be any fear of discussing the issue of working methods. I know that some delegations are opposed to having this kind of discussion, but it would be good to hear the real reasons why they do not want to hold any discussion on these topics, and it would be very good to hear those views expressed in a formal setting. Let me be clear, Mr. President: my delegation will oppose any effort to break your draft decision into two separate decisions, I believe that you have done an excellent job in trying to come up with a draft decision that can command consensus and my delegation remains very willing to work with you and others who are interested in finding a way forward on this. As I have said repeatedly in this chamber, however, my delegation cannot accept two separate decisions, breaking the discussions on working methods and membership away from the substantive parts of your decision with regard to subsidiary body work.

On the work of the subsidiary bodies, I believe that you have done an excellent job in trying to take the work of each of the bodies forward. While my delegation is opposed to a mere repeat of the exercise that was undertaken last year, you have clearly made what I believe to be a significant effort to build on the work of last year and to provide what you called forward momentum, and my delegation would be opposed to watering down the various aspects of the subsidiary bodies' work that you have outlined in your draft decision.

My last point, and one which all of us in this room have heard at one time or another, is that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. That is the view of my delegation with regard to your draft decision in its entirety.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of the United States for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Ukraine.

Mr. Klymenko (Ukraine): Mr. President, Ukraine would like first of all to commend you and your team for your tireless efforts to bring to fruition the timely and results-oriented approach reflected in the draft decision set out in document CD/WP.619. We believe that the way forward introduced in your endeavour, Mr. President, is an appropriate approach which proceeds in line with the deliberations that were held and the conclusions reached during Ukraine's presidency.

My delegation has received positive feedback from our capital with regard to this initiative and we can support the document in its entirety. Given that time is running out fast, Ukraine is generally flexible regarding the structure of the draft decision. At the same time, we see the value of having all issues relevant to our work in the Conference set out in one document. That said, we will not stand in the way of consensus on this matter.

Mr. President, we are ready to engage further with you and with other member States in tackling the remaining issues in this endeavour. We look forward to your revised draft document and are willing to continue our constructive cooperation in order to arrive at a consensus decision as soon as possible.

Mr. President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Ukraine for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Mr. President, I take the floor once again to support you in your endeavours and to affirm our agreement with the way in which you intend to revise the draft decision that you have already circulated. I am aware that you have consulted with many members, including Brazil, and I believe that the way in which

you intend to develop the text would accommodate if not the totality, at least the effective majority of points of view that need to be accommodated.

It is important to maintain the holistic nature of the decision, by addressing all issues. The working methods and membership are matters that also have a bearing on substance and it is perfectly appropriate to keep these issues under recurrent review. Accordingly, we support that approach and believe, of course, that it would be useful to clarify the mandate.

We also understand that the maintenance of a sufficiently detailed description of work under each subsidiary body, while leaving open the possibility of including a reference to items as they appear in the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, would help to ensure that, in our work, we go beyond what we achieved last year and do not merely repeat past efforts. Accordingly, I believe that we need those assurances that we will not simply repeat the same work achieved last year, we must go beyond.

Reporting in a way that captures the debate within subsidiary bodies can be challenging, I know that is your intention, and I believe that, to achieve that aim and to facilitate the work of the coordinators to that end, would require the necessary support. The record cannot be too lengthy, so it is a matter of balance and judgment as to how to capture this discussion. This undertaking might be quite labour-intensive, depending on how this particular aspect is defined.

Lastly, I would to remark that, in my view, whoever is selected or invited to coordinate these subsidiary bodies should be invited to do so by the Chair in their personal capacity as facilitators. I do not believe that these potential coordinators should necessarily be identified by regional groups because they will not be acting on behalf of any particular region. I recommend that they should act on behalf of the entire membership of the Conference on Disarmament as neutral, honest brokers and as facilitators for all. Their position would be neutral, notwithstanding, of course, the need for some sort of balance in the selection of coordinators. This new approach, which, I believe, might be slightly different from the practice that was followed last year, is one that I would support.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Argentina.

Mr. Foradori (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to welcome our new colleague from Colombia. Secondly, I would like to say that Argentina considers that the draft which has been presented is comprehensive and we believe it is important that it should remain so, as a single package. The Conference's agenda items are not so extensive as to warrant dividing them into several parts so that they can be understood. In fact, I believe that it would be excessive to produce several documents on such a short agenda item.

We also think that it is important to amend the methods of work, since we hope that by changing the methods, we might change the outcomes. Obviously, the current methodology, which was first applied many years ago, has repeatedly led to negative outcomes and it is only to be expected that if we continue to use the same methods we will keep getting the same results.

In that regard, I greatly celebrate the fact that we are talking about the democratization of the system, although I also believe that there are different points of view as to how the concept of democracy is understood, all of which have merit. In fact, the word "democratic" appears in the official names of many countries, which is absolutely and deeply respectable; I merely wish to point out that these countries have different ways of seeing democracy. We believe that the Conference's current methods are democratic, but there are other methods that are similarly democratic and which allow for inclusive participation.

For the time being, no one is advancing any particular methodology, although we would like to stress our hope that the methodology that emerges from this work will also be deeply democratic in content.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Argentina for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Canada.

Mr. Davison (Canada): Thank you very much Mr. President, two weeks ago we reacted generally in a very welcoming way to your proposal even though we had not yet seen it at that point. We have now seen the first version and we continue to believe that that is taking us in the right direction.

With regard to splitting the decision into two, we feel that this would be something of a blind alley that will cause us to spend more weeks on the issue than we can spare, and we believe that what you have laid out before us is adequate and fit for one single decision. To split it into two would simply be asking us never to make a decision at all.

We appreciate the outline that you have given of some of the changes that you are going to make, based on the consultations and the feedback that you have received in this room. While they seem reasonable to us, sight unseen, we need to exercise a little caution. We look forward to seeing the text on paper, but again I believe that you have been listening and that you are making changes in the light of what speakers have been telling you and what specific delegations have been reporting back to you.

On this notion of sight unseen, I would like to encourage you to move further in one particular direction. Along with Ireland and Namibia, Canada forms part of a body known as the Disarmament Impact Group, which is connected with the network known as the International Gender Champions. The Group provided all six of the presidents this year with a toolkit on gender perspectives and on ways of viewing disarmament through the prism of gender. We duly acknowledge Ukraine's specific reference to gender during its presidency in its opening statement and we would encourage similar acknowledgements by all presidents.

At the moment, however, I am thinking specifically about the challenges of coordinators. You already face a significant challenge in this respect, in view of the importance of regional representation, but when we look back at our work last year, we see that, in the course of the year, 10 positions of importance were assigned, and 6 of those were automatically taken by the presidents. Last year three presidents were women: the chargé d'affaires for Turkey and the Ambassadors of Sweden and Switzerland, and three were men. The coordinators last year were all men. This year the presidents are all men and I am not sure what success you are having with regard to the selection of coordinators and special coordinators. We would strongly urge you, however, to look at balance and diversity as you pursue your selections and make offers to people to serve.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Canada for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Viet Nam.

Mr. Duong Chi Dzung (Viet Nam): Mr. President, I would also like to join you and other colleagues in welcoming our distinguished colleague from Colombia. We would like also to express our sincere thanks to you for ensuring the success of the high-level segment and also for having organized a number of activities commemorating the centenary of multilateralism and the fortieth anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament.

The successful conclusion of the high-level segment last week, with the participation of 30 dignitaries, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, demonstrates that the Conference on Disarmament still raises high expectations for its role as the single multilateral disarmament negotiation forum of the international community. We believe that the many optimistic statements at the high-level segment will give momentum to our work in this year's session.

Mr. President, we would like also to thank you for your hard work in preparing and presenting the first draft of the decision before us, after a series of constructive consultations with member States.

My delegation looks forward to the adoption of the decision on the establishment of subsidiary bodies, with a view to deepening our discussion on the four core issues and appointing special coordinators for the further exploration of other very important matters before the Conference on Disarmament. The decision will rekindle substantive discussions and serve as a significant step towards paving the way to the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work in the near future.

My delegation believes that the input and directions provided by the member States will be of great assistance in improving the text. I support the view that the wording of the decision needs to be more balanced and that the requirement for balance should not hinder or delay the drafting process, but will play a very important role in ensuring that the security concerns of all member States are equally considered and accommodated, thus leaving more room for flexibility and compromise.

We therefore look forward to the revised draft of the decision that you plan to circulate tomorrow morning. In my view, an even stronger link with the agenda items will take us closer to a balanced text, and thus closer to consensus. We would like to reaffirm our readiness to continue constructively and actively to participate in the work of the Conference and look forward to making more contributions to that work during this year's session.

We also hope that the draft text of the decision will be adopted during your presidency, enabling substantive discussion to proceed at the earliest possible stage in the Conference on Disarmament and thus enabling the Conference to make its mandated contribution to the international community.

I would like to conclude by quoting the words of the Secretary-General during the high-level segment, which I shall quote in French:

(spoke in French)

“Innovative procedures are important, but the Conference will mainly be evaluated on the basis of its results.”

(spoke in English)

Lastly, I would like to encourage all member States to show greater flexibility in order to move forward quickly and finalize the draft as soon as possible.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Viet Nam for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the presidency. Is there any other delegation which would like to take the floor at this time? I recognize the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: Dear colleagues, we have had a number of meetings, both official and informal. The British presidency has also held a significant number of bilateral consultations, during which various proposals were put forward regarding the draft submitted by the President. We have also submitted our suggestions, including in writing, and proposed several options for the way forward. In view of this, we would like to address the most substantive of them.

The British draft decision on establishing subsidiary bodies of the Conference on Disarmament is a fairly good basis for further consideration of the agenda and the search for common ground to agree on a programme of work.

In our previous interventions during the unofficial meetings, we drew the attention of the delegations to the preamble of the draft decision, which sets out or defines the framework for our future work. As we see it, the preamble is the place where the inextricable link between the activities of the subsidiary bodies and the programme of work is established or reaffirmed. I would like to remind those present that agreeing on a programme of work is our main common goal. Without it, resuming the substantive negotiating work of the forum is simply not possible. The text of the preamble as it stands does not make this connection. Moreover, on more than one occasion we have spoken of the need to bring the activities of the subsidiary bodies closer to or link them up with the prospective goal of a programme of work. According to the Conference's rules of procedure, this can only be done through items on an agenda approved in advance by consensus and cannot be done through the key issues of the Conference on Disarmament.

Coming back to the preamble: in this regard, and in order to ensure a connection between the work of the subsidiary bodies and the programme of work, we have suggested a few specific written corrections. The President has them. I am taking the opportunity to confirm this on the record.

In terms of the substance: complaints are still being made about the heavy workload. Very well, if five subsidiary bodies and 50 working hours or 50 working days is a lot, we have proposed an alternative framework: combine the “nuclear” agenda items (that is items 1, 2 and 4) within a single subsidiary body. That makes three subsidiary bodies instead of five and so reduces the burden by 40 per cent. What do we have in the current decision? In the current decision, it is proposed to have four subsidiary bodies, which is one less. That is clear discrimination, especially given the simple fact that subsidiary body 5 already covers three agenda items. Therefore, what we suggested for subsidiary body 1, to combine similar agenda items, seems completely logical. We have not heard any other arguments.

Moreover, in addition to the subsidiary bodies, it is proposed that we consider procedural issues. Nobody is saying that the issue is not important. Neither have I heard any particular objections to considering it, if of course the delegations have sufficient time and resources. Here again, we recall that at least some delegations are saying that there is a lot of work. But that is not the most important point. The main point is, distinguished colleagues, what we will be considering under working methods. If this is about reviewing the rules of procedure, which essentially determine the working methods of the Conference, we should specify that. More than that, we should specify which working methods we will be considering. Make no mistake, there are no abstract working methods. All this is tangible. All this is practical. Therefore, in this part, the mandate of the Special Coordinator needs at the very least to be clarified. Clarification of a mandate, as we know from previous years’ experience, can take a significant amount of time and become an obstacle in the way of our common efforts to agree on substantive proposals for a draft decision.

The second point is the issue of membership. Here again, at the very least clarification is required. What will we be considering – expansion? Nothing is mentioned in the rules of procedure about expansion. What is mentioned there is something slightly different. So we believe that if this matter is to be discussed, it is first necessary to clarify the mandate. That is the logic behind our approach, which leads us to propose considering this issue separately in all its aspects and with a clear mandate. Incidentally, the second area related to working methods, apart from the rules of procedure, is established practice. We can consider how matters stand in that regard, but once again we must clearly specify that in the mandate of the Special Coordinator, otherwise we will be discussing anything and everything.

Thirdly, what form will the outcome of the work of the Special Coordinators on working methods and expansion of the membership take? Amendments to the rules of procedure or some other form? You know, in the history of the Conference on Disarmament, very good decisions on working methods have been adopted. Take the decision of 1990 contained in document CD/1036, in which the functions of the first presidencies were clearly defined. It is written there in black and white that if no programme of work is adopted and subsidiary bodies are not approved during the first presidency, during the remaining presidencies, starting with the second, only special coordinator positions can be considered. Perhaps I am not being absolutely precise in describing the content of the decision, but that is the essential point. If you want, you can keep looking. There are many interesting things to find in the work of our Conference.

Let us have a comprehensive review of work on working methods, but to do that, first of all we will need solid reference materials. We could ask the secretariat to prepare such materials, but it would take time. Based on the reference materials, we would be able to formulate the mandate precisely. What is illogical about any of that? However, right now we are trying to bundle everything together. We are trying to do it quickly, but it is not certain we are doing it well. Especially since the Conference on Disarmament has not considered this issue for at least 15 years. Therefore, it is understandable and even logical that delegations should have a serious, thoughtful approach to the question. But those who are putting forward this proposal almost as an ultimatum, have no arguments in favour of adopting such a decision except for its importance and other general expressions. That is not understandable.

I will not bore you with further discussion, I think that we have a lot of work still remaining.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Mr. President, last week I said that we supported your decision in its current form. We are also very flexible and look forward to seeing the revised version. My delegation's feeling is that the decision should be retained as a single package and we support your suggestion that we take the title from 2002. With regard to the various subsidiary bodies, this is a matter of determining what is feasible and what is practical and I believe that you have hit on what is most feasible.

Looking through the rules of procedure, I note that, in addition to rule 2, which talks about reviewing the membership, rule 22 mentions the holding of informal sessions. The rule also specifies that we may meet informally to discuss substantive matters, as well as questions concerning the organization of work. Accordingly, the suggestion that we are not doing substantive work unless we are talking about the four core issues is not borne out by the rules of procedure. Rule 27 also says that we should take recommendations from the General Assembly and there was a paragraph in our text last year that said that the Conference would continue consultations on expansion of the membership. In addition, one of the preambular paragraphs talks about the importance of effective multilateralism in the performance of our work and I believe that reviewing our methods of work forms part of our duty to achieve effective multilateralism. My delegation's view is that this should be a dynamic process: it is the start of a conversation and something that we should be talking about on a regular basis.

I would also support Canada's comments on diversity. I realize that this poses a challenge: a combination of willingness, capacity, interest, geographical representation and also diversity are all needed and there is something of an imbalance in this room. Even if you do not manage to ensure a balance among all the coordinators, there are practical ways that we can find to make our work more representative and more diverse.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for her statement. I recognize the distinguished Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset permit me to join others in warmly welcoming our newly arrived colleague, my neighbour, the distinguished Ambassador of Colombia. Regarding the question at hand, your draft decision, I presented the Chinese delegation's position comprehensively and in detail at the previous plenary and in the subsequent bilateral consultations. At today's meeting, I have listened attentively as many of our colleagues have exhaustively, very conscientiously and responsibly presented their own positions, comments and suggestions.

Everyone is looking forward to seeing your second draft tomorrow morning, when we will be able to comprehensively consider the positions put forward by all parties. The Chinese delegation is also confident that the homework will be done after this meeting and you will be able to fully consider the opinions of all parties in a comprehensive and balanced manner, and especially the opinions of those who have different views; those different views may subsequently help to establish a more solid basis for our work in the future, if they are fully taken on board in the current draft. Our delegation is therefore awaiting your new draft with anticipation. We will send it in due course to our capital and hopefully we will receive feedback promptly, possibly including suggestions for amendments to the text. That is what I had to say for today.

Before concluding I would like to ask you once again to present some information. As your presidency will end next week, we are all very much looking forward to making full use of the time under your presidency to step up our work. Specifically, what kind of plan of work will we have after you submit the new text tomorrow? Will we hold a plenary meeting on Thursday, and what kind of arrangements will be made for next week's meetings? There is also the question of whether you will hold further consultations at the level of the President's team, or bilaterally. In a word, if you can give us a clearer road map, it might make it easier for us all to better help with your work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his statement. As I said in my briefing on Monday for the member States that will occupy the presidency this session and

the regional groups, we intend to hold a further plenary session on Thursday this week, which will probably be an informal session, and we remain at the disposal of any delegation which wishes to make its views known either in writing or in a bilateral consultation.

As the distinguished Ambassador of China has remarked, next week is the last week of the United Kingdom's presidency. We intend to take action on a draft decision next week, but of course we will have to judge the best pace at which to do that. We certainly intend, however, to take action next week before the end of our presidency.

I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of France.

Mr. Riquet (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you for your explanations in response to the Ambassador of China. I must admit that I had a similar question, so I thank you for that very useful information. I also wanted to thank you for the information on the next steps in the process and, of course, for the proposed revised version which we await eagerly.

Mr. President, my delegation has already expressed its views several times on your draft decision, which we believe is a step in the right direction and, we hope, will enable us to ensure that this Conference finally resumes its substantive work after several weeks of discussion, so that we are then able to move forward together.

Since I have the floor, I would like to take this opportunity to respond briefly to some of the presentations by previous speakers who made certain proposals, some of which seem to go in the right direction and others which perhaps warrant further discussion. I believe that what has been said about the link between this decision and the programme of work of the Conference would be worth looking at to see how the preambular part, in particular preambular paragraph 4 of your decision, could be amended to strengthen the link between the work that will be carried out in the framework of the subsidiary bodies and the building of a consensus towards a programme of work that would, at last, enable the Conference to resume its mandate, namely the negotiation of agreements on disarmament, when conditions permit. Everyone knows that this is not currently possible, but we sincerely hope that it can be done eventually, at the earliest opportunity, especially with respect to the most mature subjects. You know how committed France, in particular, is to ensuring that negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for the manufacture of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices can take place in this forum as soon as possible.

With regard to the proposals from Canada, naturally, anything that would make it possible to move towards greater parity and improved representation of women, particularly in the leadership and coordination of subsidiary bodies, would be a step in the right direction; we therefore trust in your skills and capacity to seek out such talent.

I also wanted to respond to some other proposals that have been made, particularly to the idea of separating the two aspects, that I think are fairly well balanced in your draft decision, of the substantive work on the one hand and, on the other, the work that is more related to procedural issues and the enlargement and functioning of the Conference. I believe that any attempt to separate those two aspects would be inappropriate quite simply because we have now lost almost six, even seven weeks, in relatively laborious procedural discussions. Rather than a further separation making the discussions any simpler, I believe that, on the contrary, it would complicate or even stifle the discussions. The advantage of your proposal is that it enables a balance to be struck between the need to move forward with the substantive work – and I will come back to this in a few moments – and the need, in accordance with the rules of procedure, to consider the issue of the composition of the Conference on Disarmament and its functioning.

Moreover, I believe that your proposal, which provides for a mechanism with several coordinators, offers guarantees of balance which, in my opinion, ought to be enough to reassure delegations that may have doubts or fears about the possible conclusions of this work. Once again, given that this body operates by consensus, I do not think that one could possibly be threatened by the mere idea of a discussion on the way we operate. I believe that we are all in full agreement that this Conference is functioning neither in an ideal, nor in a nominal fashion. It does not, therefore, seem at all unwarranted to us that we should

think about this together – because better ideas come from working with others than from working alone – in order to find ways of improving our work in order to enable this forum to function normally at long last.

With regard to the substantive work, we have already had the opportunity to express our views on the general thrust of your proposal and the guidelines that you have provided and to us they all seem to be a step in the right direction. I will not repeat what has already been said. I would just like to respond to a proposal that was made to group together some of the agenda items, specifically all the issues relating to nuclear weapons, under a single item. I seem to recall that last week, one of the representatives said that this forum operated in a rather conservative manner, particularly in the area of disarmament. It seems to me that this proposal, which has the merit of not being conservative itself, would not necessarily be a step in the right direction, since all three topics, whether nuclear disarmament, a fissile material cut-off treaty or negative security assurances, have been on the agenda of the Conference for a great many years and are in keeping with the manner in which we have always been able to work and progress together. This has been clearly demonstrated by the fact that, on the issue of a fissile material cut-off treaty, we have nevertheless been able to make significant progress, having held very detailed discussions, including with delegations that have different views, sensitivities and approaches to this particular subject of the ban on the production of fissile material.

Therefore, I think that attempting to group these three subjects together would create more confusion, contribute to a watering down of the priorities and would actually end up shutting down the debate, thwarting any chance of making progress in each of these three areas. So, once again, I think that caution and reason would perhaps call for us to favour more traditional, perhaps more conservative methods. However, they would, in my opinion, enable us to perhaps progress more effectively with each of the three subjects of these three agenda items, while including, of course, the fourth item, which is the prevention of an arms race in outer space and without forgetting the remaining items that you have grouped under the leadership of a coordinator, on emerging issues and on the question of science and technology.

Once again, Mr. President, I can only reiterate our appreciation for the way in which you have conducted the discussions so far, demonstrated your ability to listen to the various proposals and, in particular, for the proposed decision, which, in our opinion, is both fully balanced and a step in the right direction. We very much look forward to receiving the revised version of your decision.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his statement and I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Takamizawa (Japan): Mr. President, I would like to echo what has been said here in the room. First, I believe that it is really important to accelerate our process. To that end, I fully concur with the importance of agreeing on the draft decision during the presidency of the United Kingdom. I would like to add, however, that your presidency will be much more important in the coming sessions, because the ambiguity can never be entirely overcome, so your understanding of the decision will be much more critical in the coming sessions. That notwithstanding, I still believe that speed does matter and that it is time to take action.

My second point is to note the importance of the one-package approach, the holistic approach: I believe that it is really important to have all elements included in the programme and in the decision. Japan has insisted on the importance of such inclusiveness. If we cannot agree on something, just to cut it out will not necessarily lead to consensus. So I believe that an inclusive approach, while admitting diversity, should enable us to move forward.

Third, I note the idea of drawing on past wisdom, on the agreements and decisions of the past: I fully support that idea so long as the specific nature of the decision is maintained. I believe that maturity and a value-added approach are very important in this process. To that end, we should combine the comprehensive nature of the wording with some more specific wording. I believe that you outlined some suggestions to that end this morning which will help us to move forward.

With regard to the clarity of procedures, as I have already noted, I believe that some level of ambiguity will need to be maintained. At the same time, however, I really encourage you in your efforts to clarify some of the ambiguous parts in the coming sessions or in your new draft.

Lastly, with regard to the coordinators and the subsidiary bodies, I note in particular two points, relating, in the past, to the coordinators or facilitators of the working group on the way ahead and the subsidiary bodies. These are two very important points: the first is the attitude taken to the issue, how the issue is to be addressed. We set great store by the attitudes of the coordinators. The second point is that of personality: personality does matter and I hope that you know a great many people in Geneva and that the people that you find will act appropriately and be good listeners. At the same time, I hope that they will have leadership qualities and cooperate with you and that there will be women among them. I recall that one panel consisted entirely of men, but at the last moment that was changed and we included one woman. I know that there are such persons in this room.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his statement. I give the floor once again to the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, I would like to make our discussion a little more interactive and quote from some statements in favour of conservatism from a document, more precisely from a draft programme of work from 2016, on the link between the agenda and the programme of work and on attitudes to the agenda. I will not read it all, so as not to take up too much of your attention.

(*spoke in English*)

Determined to pursue all items on its agenda in a balanced and comprehensive manner, without prejudice to any, in accordance with and fully respecting its rules of procedure, and given the mandate conferred to the Conference on Disarmament by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

(*spoke in Russian*)

And now the most important point, regarding what has been said about there being no precedent for a comprehensive review of the agenda items. I will quote the first operative paragraph from the same document:

(*spoke in English*)

To establish a working group and an associated programme of work for the duration of the 2016 session to identify, elaborate and recommend effective measures on nuclear disarmament, including legal provisions and other arrangements that contribute to and are acquired for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons;

(*spoke in Russian*)

... and so on.

Distinguished colleagues, this is almost the same programme of work for which the overwhelming majority of Conference participants were prepared to vote. What is the problem now? Or is 2 years as long as 20 years? I don't understand. And I have still not heard any arguments.

As for gender perspectives, I have a question about that: has anyone asked the women? Are they willing to take on coordinating roles? Mr. President, you held a large number of consultations, perhaps you can tell us. I also have a question for my Canadian colleague: does this proposal mean that Canada is willing to put forward a candidate for subsidiary body 2?

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his statement. Let me reassure him that I have consulted widely across the group and that there is a broad and deep array of talent represented in the Conference on Disarmament across all regions. I encourage those who are willing to help us to take forward the work of the

Conference this year to make themselves known. I intend to circulate a list of the proposed coordinators very shortly.

I give the floor once again to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Davison (Canada): Mr. President, in response to your question, I am not sure that we will be in a position within the confines of the Conference on Disarmament to offer up a coordinator, but I recall that in 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2018 we did offer up chairs of a group of governmental experts and a preparatory group on a fissile material cut-off treaty and they were both women.

The President: I thank the representative of Canada for his statement. I now give the floor – with apologies for having overlooked him earlier – to the distinguished representative of Mexico.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Firstly, we would like to welcome the Permanent Representative of Colombia on assuming her new functions in this Conference on Disarmament. Secondly, we would like to point out that our position – which is well known – is that any exercise relating to a possible decision must be linked to fulfilling or facilitating the Conference's negotiating mandate, and not merely a deliberative exercise.

Of course, we understand that you have made a particular effort so as to give the subsidiary bodies the ability to work progressively on the basis of the previous decision. In that regard, and although we have not yet seen it in writing, we acknowledge that you have told us that you will follow the approach of specifying more clearly the agenda items to be addressed by the different subsidiary bodies. You have also sought to improve the balance between formal and informal meetings, so that there is a record of the discussions that take place in the Conference. Clearly, we would have preferred to have more formal meetings, but we recognize that that was your intention. We also recognize the improvement made in respect of the adoption of the coordinators' reports, so that there is more time for their consideration and assessment, so that they have a substantive content that precisely reflects the richness of the discussions held, and so that they may provide elements that contribute to overcoming the deadlock in the Conference.

However, there is another critical aspect that the delegation of Mexico mentioned in a previous formal meeting: that of re-evaluating the mandate conferred by operative paragraph 2 of the draft decision. Without doubt, we believe that there is a key aspect to this mandate, which is to consider effective measures, including legal instruments for negotiation. If the effort of establishing subsidiary bodies is genuinely intended to overcome the deadlock, then this is the key aspect that the subsidiary bodies must seek to address. The two other points, namely those of deepening technical discussions and of finding commonalities, may also be mentioned as the means whereby the ultimate objective might be achieved. However, for my delegation, the mandate of the subsidiary bodies is not three separate or equivalent components, but that there is one key component – to find negotiation elements and legal instruments – which is then complemented by the other two points mentioned in the paragraph. In this regard, I think that we could also support what has been mentioned about supplementing the preambular paragraphs so that they as a whole strengthen the link between all of this work and the unblocking of the impasse in the Conference.

That, then, was the comment that I think my delegation made at a previous meeting. We consider it very important to include this point in the list of topics in the revised version that you mentioned that you would circulate.

On many occasions we have expressed our support and agreement with topics to do with methods of work and the expansion of the membership. We can accept the inclusion of those topics within a single decision, but we are flexible in that regard and can also live with separate decisions.

Lastly, recognizing the serious difficulties in finding a gender balance at a time when disarmament forums in general, including this one, are unbalanced in terms of women's representation, we would like to underscore the importance that we attach to this issue and our willingness to support efforts in that regard.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Mexico for his statement. Would any other delegation like to take the floor at this time? That does not seem to be the case.

Excellencies, dear colleagues, thank you once again for the views that you have expressed this morning. As I mentioned earlier, we intend to circulate a revised draft very shortly. I also intend within a very short time to circulate a list of the proposed coordinators. We will endeavour to take as many points on board as we can. We have to strike a balance: of course, not all the points are mutually compatible but we will do our best to produce something which we believe can command consensus and provide us with a good way of structuring our work, to allow us to have some really substantive discussions for the remainder of this session.

Again, I invite any delegation which so wishes to contact us for bilateral consultations or to submit any proposals in writing; otherwise we shall submit our revised text of the proposed draft decision through the secretariat by tomorrow morning.

That concludes our business for the day. We shall meet again, probably in an informal session, at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 7 March, when, I hope, we shall be able to discuss further the revised text that we shall circulate shortly.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.