

Conference on Disarmament

English

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


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 14 March 2019, at 3.15 p.m.

President: Mr. Aidan Liddle.....(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

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The President: I call to order the 1496th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Good afternoon, colleagues.

Distinguished colleagues, I intend to pick up where we left off this morning. I hope you have all now had your final instructions from your capitals. I believe we have been talking about this decision for a long time. We have had some intensive discussions about it and I hope that the extra few hours this morning allowed you to get your instructions from your capitals. Before we proceed further, I recognize the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Dear colleagues, before I make a point of order, I would like to say a few words on the reason for my point. Before today's meeting, I had asked the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to give me the floor. It was not given to me, however. We then also raised our flag to make a statement on the same point. The floor, as you know, was not given to us then, either, on the pretext that we had not raised our flag in time.

Why am I saying this? For one simple reason: we wasted a few more hours instead of making the necessary clarifications that would allow us to find a way out of the complex situation we have been put in with regard to the draft decision of the Conference on Disarmament.

I will start with a chronology of events. As you will recall, some additional proposals were made orally at the plenary meeting of the Conference on Tuesday. If I remember correctly, the Conference agreed to only one of the proposed amendments – namely, to preambular paragraph 9, where the word “multiculturalism” was replaced by the word “multilateralism”. In this regard, we agree with the President, albeit only in part, that the amendments were of a technical or editorial nature. Like other delegations, we did not learn about the changes that had been made until closer to yesterday evening – that is, on 13 March. We cannot agree with the President that all the revisions he has made are of a technical nature.

First, I would like to draw your attention to operative paragraph 2, in which the order of priority of the tasks of the subsidiary bodies has undergone a significant change. Whereas at first the focus was on the consideration of effective measures, now it is on legally binding instruments. That requires negotiation. In this connection, even without approval from our capital, we had an immediate proposal. It was to add the phrase “under the agreed comprehensive and balanced programme of work” after the words “legally binding instruments for negotiations”, as negotiations could not proceed without reference to the programme of work of the Conference.

The second point is on operative paragraph 7. We cannot agree to an undefined mandate for a special coordinator or coordinators. Here, the reference is specifically to consultations with delegations – i.e., the special coordinators will determine, at their discretion, the delegations with which they will consult, whether or not those delegations are members of the Conference. References to Conference members are made only below, in the part of the draft where formal and informal meetings are mentioned.

In this regard, in our view, it would be more appropriate for the President, in reissuing this document, to change the symbol to Rev.3 and the date to 13 March. Such a change would accurately reflect the chronology and the facts. Of course, in that case we would provide – as we have already done orally, albeit a few hours later than we had meant to – additional comments. Moreover, colleagues, at a plenary meeting on Tuesday, which was on the record, the Russian delegation expressed the view that any amendments to such an important document as a draft decision of the Conference on Disarmament should, in our system, be approved by our capital. And it is not always possible to agree on substantive issues in a few hours.

We strongly encourage the President to incorporate our proposed amendments and then to continue the discussions on the document. If the President intends to do as we suggest, I will stop there, as we have one more statement to make before any steps are taken and the draft is formally submitted for adoption. Otherwise, we are ready to read out our main statement, in which we will set out our motives and our position on this draft decision.

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

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me first of all to welcome the Director-General, who is joining us at this meeting. We have requested the floor because of what happened this morning. We would like to make plain the position of Cuba, so I will probably have to split my remarks into two parts. I would first like to address the procedural issues and then, depending on how we decide to proceed in this meeting, we will discuss positions that are perhaps more substantive.

First, though, Mr. President, my delegation would like to emphasize that this morning's meeting began with the remarks of an Ambassador who set out some procedural and substantive reasons why we should not be forced to take action on a draft on which there is patently no agreement. Another delegation took the floor, and then you simply cut the meeting short without listening to all the delegations that might have wanted to speak. You called this meeting at the unusual time of 2.50 p.m. We were here then, but the meeting did not start, or at least that is what we understood from the interpretation. Neither was agreement obtained from those present, who are likely to have other responsibilities this afternoon. You also asked us to take action on a decision that is drafted in English only, rather than in the six working languages of the Conference on Disarmament, and you invoked a 24-hour rule to convene this meeting.

This time has been very valuable for our delegation. We have reviewed the rules of procedure, and nowhere did we find a rule that obliges us to take action on something 24 hours after it has been circulated by the secretariat. We were even more diligent and tried to find a similar practice or rule in the rules of the General Assembly of the United Nations. It is still not clear to us, since there are evidently a large number of observations on and objections to the draft decision, what the basis for convening this meeting is and why there is a rush to make a decision. We would like clarification on this point, because, obviously, if we are applying the rules of the General Assembly in a subsidiary manner – and it was the General Assembly that adopted the resolution establishing this Conference – then I would like to note that there are also other rules that would, for example, allow us to make immediate amendments to your decision. The first action that would have to be taken, then, would relate to your decision as amended by any of the delegations present, so that later we can make a decision on the first decision.

I think that pushing a decision through over objections is unwise. With this point, I will conclude my remarks on procedural matters and turn to two fundamental issues. If you look at rule 18 of the Conference's rules of procedure, you will see that it says, "the Conference shall conduct its work and adopt its decisions by consensus". In other words, there must be consensus for this Conference to make a decision or do its work, and there is nothing in the rules of procedure that gives the President the unilateral power to push decisions through when it is clear that there is no consensus on work or on a decision. The same point is made in paragraph 120 of the resolution that was adopted at the tenth special session of the General Assembly and led to the establishment of this Conference.

Further searching also reveals document CD/PV.1338, which contains the record of a meeting of the Conference on 13 February 2015. I will quote from this record of the Conference, in which one delegation says that the decision does not improve anything and should not be taken lightly and that a "take it or leave it" approach is not acceptable. The Ambassador of the United Kingdom, whom I am quoting, uttered the following words: "Therefore, at this point in time, we request that you defer a decision on the establishment of the working group on methods of work until we have clearly examined what you are now proposing orally" (p. 14). I am literally quoting the words spoken by your predecessor, Ambassador Pollard, four years ago. The time we have been given has allowed us to conduct a valuable examination of these documents, and we truly wonder whether the path that we are deciding on in this Conference is the most appropriate one to take if, as we have said from the outset, we wish to avoid politicization and concentrate on the mandate of the Conference, which is to negotiate legally binding instruments that promote disarmament, specifically in an international context where disarmament should be a primary concern.

In closing, I would like to say that we are also in a position to shape other substantive elements of your draft decision, but I think these words will help us to reflect a little on what we are really doing today. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. We wish to emphasize once again that Venezuela has participated in all the discussions with a constructive mindset, and in that context we have requested express guarantees concerning some of the proposals contained in the draft decision, those relating to the proposed subsidiary bodies and coordinators in particular. Regrettably, however, our suggestions were not accepted. My delegation would like to reiterate that it recognizes the need to review the membership of the Conference on Disarmament, as long as the review is geared towards expansion, which could help the Conference generate new momentum and give it new ideas.

We firmly reiterate – and this is not a message to Garcia – that our delegation is opposed to all attempts, including those made in the past and those planned for the future, to exclude or disparage member States. My country regrets that it must stress that, because of their Governments' undisguised, well-known belligerence towards the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, some Ambassadors proposed as coordinators will not be able to ensure transparency, equanimity and balance. In that context, we would like to know what course of action the President will propose, so that we may proceed accordingly. We will therefore refrain from making further comments until a proposal for action is made by the President of the Conference, who, we must acknowledge, has made exceptional efforts to accommodate the concerns of all delegations. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President, and welcome to the Director-General. I think his presence signifies what we are all feeling: that this is quite an important meeting for the Conference on Disarmament today. Also, the previous speakers acknowledged the President and his impartial way of dealing with this issue so far, and I want to echo the praise for the way he has conducted business and steered us to this decision.

For my delegation, there was no doubt whatsoever about the process and about the procedure we were following, which was geared to a decision today, so I am a bit surprised at the turn this debate has taken this afternoon; the spirit in this room in recent weeks has been very constructive, and let us be frank about what we are deciding today. It is very simple: whether we continue, as the Conference, with substantive work, or whether we as a group reflect on the procedures, the working methods and enlargement, a theme which has been discussed for years in this room. It is such a very simple discussion. The only question is whether there is the political will for it.

This week, the American Ambassador, eloquently, I think, gave voice to the mood in this room, and I want to praise him for his statement. And I fully subscribe to his words, but he set the tone we all feel in this room. It is entirely up to us, then, whether we make this decision or not, and we can go on with a very lengthy procedural debate. We made the decision last year in English, so it was not a problem then. We have a 24-hour rule – it is not a rule; it is a practice, so we can debate this for weeks. But the question here for all of us is whether we take the responsibility to go on with the Conference or not.

We all have to reflect: if this decision is negative today or if we do not come to a decision, there will be major consequences, and all of us will have to bear them. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement and give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Ağacikoğlu (Turkey): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to thank you and your team for your continuous efforts throughout your presidency. An atmosphere of cooperation and mutual understanding prevails in the Chamber thanks to

your skilful leadership as the President of the Conference on Disarmament. I also would like to reiterate my delegation's appreciation for the hard work you have done to provide the Conference with a draft decision.

Mr. President, since the first version of the draft decision was circulated, we outlined our position in two formal plenary meetings and during our bilateral consultations. We underlined the strong parts of the draft decision and the parts that need to be further studied. Some other delegations also expressed concerns about the draft. We believe that it is premature to take action on the draft; its content and language can be further improved to reach a consensual text. Therefore, we propose not to rush into taking action, and to continue discussions on the draft. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Turkey for his statement and give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for all the efforts you have made in drafting this decision. My delegation does not intend to stand in the way of adopting any decision which is agreeable to everyone in this room. However, it cannot simply ignore the fact that some delegations have expressed their concern and disagreement on key elements of the current draft decision and that there is a rush to adopt the decision without addressing them.

If we really want this year's session to have the best possible outcome, the decision on which our substantive work depends should be devoid of ambiguity or controversial components, or there will be negative consequences, and our work will be made complicated. We still have room for further consultations to overcome differences and come up with a solution supported by all members of the Conference on Disarmament. Therefore, I would recommend that we allow more time for consideration of further improvements to and clarification of this draft.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you once again to you and your team for all the effort you have put in to try to get us to a consensus on this.

We have been going at this for a number of weeks now, and this text, the current draft, is what my delegation would consider to be a reasonable compromise. There are some in this room who, if we had carried on these discussions for 16 more weeks, would find reason not to agree to the text. I think you have been more than fair, considerate and creative in terms of trying to come up with a compromise, but there is a core group in this room that has no interest in moving the Conference on Disarmament forward, so I would say very simply, Mr. President, there has been enough time for countries to get instructions. We have had plenty of debate, and it is now time to take action on your draft.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his statement and give the floor again to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, if I understand correctly, you will not make any further changes to the draft decision. We would thus like to focus on some substantive issues, and our statement will be, among other things, an answer to those who call on us to demonstrate political will.

Colleagues, the second presidency of the annual session of the Conference on Disarmament – the British presidency – comes to an end this week. It is time to take stock of what we have done. First, we must note the lack of progress towards the main aim of our joint efforts – agreement on a mutually acceptable programme of work. It is a pity that our British colleagues did not heed the considerable amount of advice they were given or take advantage of the previous presidency's draft programme of work.

I recall that the Russian delegation immediately supported those who favoured a two-track approach, i.e., parallel work on two interlinked and complementary tracks: the programme of work and the draft decision on subsidiary bodies. We trust that subsequent Presidents of the Conference on Disarmament, including our American colleagues, will give due consideration to the programme of work and make new efforts in that regard.

Colleagues, I would like to stress that we have been making this point from the outset, not just now, as the British presidency comes to a close. And there must be no pretending that no one was aware of our position. The same principal points were made by Ambassador Gatilov during the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Russian delegation has repeatedly and extensively commented on the British draft at the Conference and in bilateral meetings. We have also proposed written amendments that would ensure a comprehensive and balanced consideration of all agenda items. I will not repeat myself. I am simply going to focus on the main points.

First, with a view to ensuring a direct link between the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, which was adopted by consensus, and the work of the subsidiary bodies, we suggested structuring the work of the subsidiary bodies around the agenda items, as was done at the 2018 session. Many other delegations, incidentally, made similar suggestions. To continue working in a balanced manner – a goal that, by the way, is mentioned in the preamble to the draft decision – we called for the establishment of an independent subsidiary body under agenda items 5 to 7, not unlike what was done last year. Neither our views nor those of other delegations, however, were taken into account.

Second, we have taken into account both the concerns about the increasing burden on delegations and the experience of previous years. There have been proposals, based on existing precedents, to merge the three core items on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament under one subsidiary body. Following through on such a proposal would make it possible to approach nuclear disarmament in a comprehensive manner, in all its aspects and with consideration given to the combination of factors affecting strategic stability and global security. In view of the increasing erosion of the international arms control architecture, launching a multilateral dialogue on nuclear disarmament, as called for in this chamber by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, would be of particular relevance. The Conference on Disarmament, because of its specificity and its membership, which includes all the key actors, is the optimal forum – if not in fact the only one – for resolving this pressing issue. The Conference, however, has turned a deaf ear to our call for a substantive and professional discussion of the most urgent international security issue. Instead, the disarmament experts in this chamber have chosen, as they did twenty years ago, to discuss but a few isolated aspects of nuclear disarmament, at a remove from the overall strategic context and the tectonic changes taking place the world over.

Third, in the absence of any international legal restrictions, we called for a halt to the disregard for the growing threat of the transformation of outer space into a new arena for armed confrontation. One option for avoiding a negative scenario is the immediate commencement of negotiations on the Sino-Russian draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects. By commencing such negotiations, the Conference on Disarmament would focus on key aspects of the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which are of direct relevance to the Conference as the single negotiating body in the field of disarmament, while, at the same time, avoiding overlap with other specialized forums. However, that was not done, either. We emphasized our readiness to consider any constructive alternative proposals for preventing an arms race in outer space. I can conclude only that there neither are nor have been any such proposals. We do, however, hear quite a bit about the importance of space debris, space weather, the regulation of space traffic and other such topics, irrespective of their relevance to the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Fourth, with reference to our speech at the high-level segment, we focused on the task of countering acts of terror committed with weapons of mass destruction and noted that in 2017 the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, proposed that a convention to combat chemical and biological terrorism be developed at the Conference. In our view, such a convention, an outline of which was submitted to the Conference, would

greatly enhance the effectiveness of overall efforts to combat the dangerous scourge of acts of terrorism committed with weapons of mass destruction. Most Conference members, however, have acted as if there were no such scourge. As a result, the draft decision refers only to a few new findings and threats, without specifying what kind of work is being done in parallel in specialized and more appropriate venues.

Fifth, we have heard numerous calls for the Conference to resume substantive work without delay. We, for our part, have expressed a preference for dealing with substantive issues and, to keep from losing sight of those truly important issues, leaving any procedural issues to be addressed separately, especially since, despite the requests of many delegations, the mandate of the special coordinator on the methods of work of the Conference and its membership has not yet been clearly defined – that is, none of our comments is reflected in the draft decision.

Consequently, and in view of the serious objections to the draft by a number of other members of the Conference, the Russian delegation proposes that it not be submitted for adoption. More work must be done on the draft for it to win universal acceptance and be adopted by consensus. No consensus is apparent now.

In conclusion, we emphasize once again the spirit of serious dialogue on all the items on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament in the format agreed upon by delegations. We reaffirm our commitment to constructive engagement with the British presidency, the six presidents of the 2019 session and all delegations in a bid to ensure that the Conference resumes substantive work.

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

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I would like first of all to say that you have conducted our work this month in exemplary fashion. I would also like to say that you have done so in full transparency, in a fully inclusive manner and in full conformity with the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament. And I wanted to commend you for your work, for which my capital is also deeply grateful.

We completely disagree with the views of your conduct of proceedings expressed by some delegations. We also believe that the proposal on the table, as orally amended, does not alter the substance of the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.619/Rev.2; on the contrary, it improves it and takes into account all the comments made on Tuesday by all the delegations present here. The solution you have proposed is not, as some say, a default solution; it is the path back to substantive work for the Conference, and it is, in our view, the most appropriate way of reconciling opposing political views and overcoming procedural obstacles.

We are fully persuaded that we must take exactly that path, as it is the only way back to fulfilling the Conference mandate, which is negotiation. This proposal, as it happens, lays the groundwork for future disarmament agreements. I note, moreover – and I have said this before – that the Conference worked this way when it was functioning normally. We are regressing, then. We are regressing if we do not reach agreement on this decision today. If we do not manage to adopt this decision, it is because there is a problem of political will, and this is of great concern at a time when, more than ever – against an extremely tense strategic backdrop that we are all aware of – efforts to regulate arms need to be given new life. I would therefore simply like to emphasize anew the deep concern of my country and my delegation over this situation.

Mr. President, my delegation is prepared to join the consensus on your draft decision. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of France for his statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to recognize all the hard work you have undertaken during the course of the past four weeks in preparing a draft programme of work for the 2019 session of the Conference

on Disarmament. We understand how difficult it has been, especially in the current international political context.

This morning, you adjourned the meeting so swiftly that I did not get a chance to offer well wishes along with the cards we had distributed earlier, on the occasion of the approaching spring. Let me now, then, take this opportunity to wish you all an inspiring spring, which will soon be upon us. In one week from now, Iranians, alongside millions more in all four corners of the world, will celebrate Nowruz, the beginning of spring, with the hope of a better future for our fellow human beings and for our planet. I offer congratulations to you all in advance.

In Persian, Mr. President, we say, “*sāli ke nekust, az bahāraš peydāst*”, meaning that a good spring heralds a good year. In English, I think you say, “a good beginning makes a good ending”. That is perhaps why people say April and May are the key months of the year. Well begun is half done, and we need to be extremely careful about how we begin. To have a good beginning, we need to act with diligence, patience and caution. Hasty decisions made under undue ultimatums may prove consequential. We, of course, do care for this body as the sole multilateral platform for disarmament negotiations and we are all best advised to keep it purely so.

We cannot afford to reduce this body to a chamber for generating political controversies and divides, initiating debates irrelevant to the mandate of the Conference and paving the way to turning the Conference into a clearing house for political animosities and differences. That will only polarize our debates and undermine multilateralism at a time when we need it more than ever.

With that said, Mr. President, we stress the need to focus on substance and work on the central mandate of the Conference, which is nuclear disarmament, by addressing its four core items. We agree with the colleague from the Netherlands and others that this meeting of the Conference is highly important in shaping the future of the Conference and its functions. We echo the concern raised by other delegations and ask you, Mr. President, to continue your engagement with member States to craft a draft programme of work which would be agreeable to all. To that end, political will is needed from all sides.

I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I am taking the floor, first of all, to state our view that you have performed exceptionally well as President of this body. You provided us with a logical follow-up to the initiative taken by the Ambassador of Ukraine during the first presidency.

In my view, that was a serious attempt to provide us with a draft programme of work, and opportunity was given to all to demonstrate the flexibility and the political will to adopt such a programme; however, it proved impossible. Consensus did not form around that text within the allotted time frame. The next best initiative would have been to move forward with your proposed draft decision for the establishment of the subsidiary bodies, so that the achievements of 2018 – the momentum that we managed to build with the reports, debates and discussions – and efforts that we made over the course of that year would not go to waste. The outcome was recognized by many, within and without this chamber, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations and ministers, who spoke to us during the high-level meeting and acknowledged the quality, nature, importance and relevance of the work that we did last year.

It is a pity that, for lack of flexibility, political will or a common understanding of the importance of the Conference on Disarmament, we may be left this year without the opportunity to continue the good work we started. I believe that, for those who wish to see progress on core agenda items such as the prevention of an arms race in outer space and a fissile material cut-off treaty, the absence of a decision will certainly not provide that pathway for progress and will leave us with a very harmful void – a gap – in the continuity of our discussions.

We need this because, inter alia, we have processes running outside the Conference on these matters. Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, on both the prevention of an arms race in outer space and a fissile material cut-off treaty, call for the outcomes of these exercises to be brought back to us for consideration. Most of us – all, I think – recognize that this is the single body for negotiations. If it is, I think we need to continue to have the opportunity, and an agenda, for serious debate.

For those who are concerned with politicization, I believe that the absence of a decision to work on the substantive issues on the agenda will in fact increase politicization, not diminish it. In my view, the antidote to politicization is working on substance and on disarmament discussions and investing in the disarmament discussion at both a technical and political level.

We are very concerned at the course of events. We do not think we have a full session to keep this discussion going. There was a notion that if we were not in a position to adopt such a decision during the course of your presidency, we would probably not be able to later in the year, as there would no longer be sufficient time. It is thus now or never.

My delegation has tried to show the greatest flexibility in order to see a decision go forward. We are not supportive of members making particular suggestions regarding whether prospective coordinators are impartial. I think we can trust all members of this body to be impartial and to fulfil whatever mandate they may be given by the Chamber, always on a very transparent, open and consensual basis, the basis upon which we work. We think you followed the rules of procedure and met all the necessary requirements. And my delegation is willing, of course, up to the last moment, to make any effort necessary to make that final push, if the final push is a viable one.

Of course, I am not sure at this point whether it is possible to overcome some of the apparently persistent resistance through drafting exercises or through further clarification of particular aspects of this decision. If that is the case, I would be willing to go the extra mile, but I think the members who still have these issues pending should indicate to us whether or not the extra effort would be worthwhile. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Brazil for his statement. I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President. Once again, I find myself agreeing with the Ambassador from Brazil. The absence of a decision today will increase the scope for mischief and politicization. We would really like to do substantive work this year. We very much enjoyed the discussion in the subsidiary bodies last year and hope to do it again this year. We also see value in shining a light on our working practices. We see it as an opportunity for all Conference on Disarmament members.

We need to remember how this body is seen in the overall disarmament architecture. If we do not take a decision today, when we have had two good years of discussions, that will reflect poorly on this body. We think that, yes, the body works by consensus, but there are different ways to reach consensus; there is an aspect of leaning in and having some courage, testing ourselves and asking whether this decision is really so dreadful that we want to rule out the prospect of substantive work this year. For Australia, that is certainly not the case.

You have performed your role in a very transparent, open way and in good faith. We think that we are ready to join the consensus and we would actually like to see the Conference try to take action on this decision. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for her statement. I give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Makarowski (Sweden): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Allow me also to thank you for your work and your efforts. The term “exemplary” has been used in this connection. I fully subscribe to that opinion. There were other opinions expressed which I do not share. Some opinions, expressed openly or implicitly, were intended to cast doubt on your efforts and your intentions. My delegation does not share those views. Some delegations expressed disappointment that their proposals were not included in your draft in

full. That sentiment is shared by most of us, perhaps all of us. That is the nature of compromise.

Your draft proposal, as orally amended this morning, is a compromise that, given political will, should be acceptable to all. My delegation is certainly ready to join the consensus on your proposal. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Sweden for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. After listening to the statements delivered today, my doubts about the interpretation of the word consensus in this room have increased. Of course, the term has always been somewhat controversial in the United Nations, but today there seem to be two different worlds when it comes to interpreting the term. Let me begin by reiterating my personal appreciation of the efforts that have been made to date.

The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly underscored the need for the Conference on Disarmament to resume its substantive work by adopting a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that is in line with its negotiating mandate. Despite our reservations regarding the institutionalization of the approach adopted by the Conference during the past two years, which was based on renouncing the endeavour to agree on a programme of work and focusing our decisions on the establishment of subsidiary deliberative bodies that duplicate the work undertaken elsewhere, Syria joined the consensus that was reached last year and the year before. However, as I indicated in my statement this morning, we support the establishment of subsidiary bodies and action to enable the Conference to proceed with substantive work as soon as possible.

At the same time, we believe that additional consultations are required on the nomination of the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies. As is well known, the Conference addressed these two issues during last year's session by means of two separate decisions. The same applies to the approach adopted to the proposed text on procedural matters, especially with regard to the proposal concerning the special coordinator tasked with improving the functioning of the Conference and expanding its membership. It is a mandate that requires greater clarification, but the requisite clarifications are not contained in the draft decision proposed by the presidency, although this was requested by many States. We wish to be informed of the content of the mandate clearly and in advance. My delegation expressed these concerns during the consultations and during all the meetings held during your presidency. It has adopted a constructive position on the proposed text, while continuing to underscore the need to specify criteria for the mandate as well as the terms of reference and scope of the tasks of the special coordinator on procedural issues. Yet these proposals were not taken into account in the proposed text of the draft decision. As we have already emphasized in this regard, we are unable to support the speedy establishment by the President of an open mandate on the functioning and membership of the Conference without full clarity regarding the content of the mandate and the proposals to be presented by the coordinator. Furthermore, we cannot endorse the artificial deadlines that have been set.

The proposed text in its current form regrettably fails to surmount existing political differences in this room. In fact, as we have heard this afternoon, it generates additional differences. We believe that the submission of a single draft decision that addresses issues related to substantive work on an equal footing with contentious procedural issues is fruitless and cannot secure a consensus in this room. It goes without saying that the submission of a draft decision for adoption and the holding of a vote thereon requires the approval of all Conference members. The proposed text is clearly not mature enough to be submitted for adoption, since it fails to address the concerns that we have heard this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Mushayavanhu (Zimbabwe): Thank you, Mr. President. We are also happy to recognize the presence of the Director-General. I and my delegation would like to join others who have spoken before me in thanking you, Mr. President, for the work that you have put into crafting the draft decision before us. We would also like to congratulate you for the professional manner in which you and your delegation have been conducting the business of the Conference on Disarmament since your assumption of the presidency. I commend you on your efforts to synthesize the divergent views from the house to come up with a draft decision that could be agreed to by the Conference.

Mr. President, while Zimbabwe had hoped for the adoption of a programme of work for the Conference, which we feel is long overdue, the current initiative, which tries to build on the work done in subsidiary bodies last year, remains essential as we seek to narrow the differences that are standing in the way of a consensus. We recognize that there are areas that some delegations are not comfortable with in the current draft decision. We nevertheless remain hopeful of the possibility of bridging these differences to ensure that the remainder of the year is devoted to substantive discussions. We remain flexible on the eventual final decision.

I thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Zimbabwe for his statement and give the floor once again to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Now I may revert to the statement that we had prepared for the morning's meeting. It began with an expression of gratitude to you for your efforts to adopt a decision by consensus and a reference to our view that we are getting closer to something on which we could reach meaningful agreement but that we could not accept an artificial deadline as long as there are still substantive differences. The issues raised by your draft decision are too difficult to be resolved by your good-faith efforts to reach a consensus. The delegation of Cuba has been constructive and flexible from the outset. I will put my reasons forward so that they are on the record. From day one, we have been clear and transparent in all our proposals to you, and you have received them graciously.

We are among the delegations that firmly believe in and defend the Conference on Disarmament, which has a very clear mandate. It is the sole forum for negotiating legally binding disarmament instruments. Nonetheless, it has gone twenty years, or more than twenty years, without fulfilling the mandate it was given by the General Assembly. We have maintained that the subsidiary bodies, which we supported last year and are prepared to support this year, are not, in view of the obvious deadlock in the Conference, the most suitable solution but that they could nevertheless allow us to move forward. These subsidiary bodies, if we repeat last year's exercise, as we are proposing now, were designed to deliberate, not to negotiate. They do not constitute a programme of work that is being submitted for adoption by the Conference on Disarmament. A decision on the adoption of a programme of work is being held in abeyance, and perhaps we could do the same with this draft decision, which takes us even further from the mandate to negotiate legally binding instruments.

We have shown and are showing flexibility in accepting the establishment of these subsidiary bodies despite the doubts that we have expressed, because we understand that, with goodwill, these discussions could bring us closer to fulfilling our obligations. We joined and are present in the Conference on Disarmament with that goodwill. It would have been very wise to have accepted the many proposals to, for example, do the same as was done last year when the subsidiary bodies were established, as they were established by consensus then. This year, however, we have insisted on complicating that proposal and that consensus. It was neither our delegation nor, probably, the delegations that expressed doubts that wished to complicate this draft decision.

Cuba fully supports the expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament and would certainly support working to make the Conference more effective. We are open to an honest and constructive debate on these issues; however, we will not agree, as we have stated from day one, to the use of these issues to continue politicizing the Conference. Both proposals now in the draft decision have been considered but not adopted

in the recent past, and less because our delegation did not support them than because they were questioned by some delegations that, today, are hypocritically supporting them.

We do not break agreements reached by consensus in order to prevent other States from participating in the Conference on Disarmament. We do not break the rules of procedure of the Conference – and I fully agree with my colleagues that actions have consequences. That is why we should all reflect collectively on all the actions that a group of delegations has been taking in the Conference since last year and how they have a negative impact on the trust that, as negotiators, we owe each other. It is against this backdrop that we have been or are being forced to consider something on which there is clearly no consensus.

As your proposal was being considered, several delegations, including some that were fully in favour of it, asked you, for example, to ensure that the work to be done by the special coordinators was spelled out in advance – that is, to draw up a schedule for their formal and informal meetings. Of course we are flexible: we never asked for one, two, three or four meetings. We left it up to you. This flexibility, however, was met with silence. We do not recall anyone in this chamber who objected to working to ensure that this institution, which is of such concern to us, functions predictably. That concern, however, is simply not reflected.

Questions have been asked about why the special coordinator on the improved functioning of the Conference and the expansion of its membership has to report during the second part of the annual session – that is, in a few weeks rather than at the end of the session, as would be logical and as the other coordinators would do. We have not heard an answer to that question, either. We have also asked for the mandate of this coordinator to be defined or more clearly spelled out and we have been willing to hear any proposal to that end. No one has objected; however, there is no mandate. The special coordinator has a blank cheque to use as and when she sees fit.

I say to you very clearly that if we do not make a decision on the subsidiary bodies this year, it is not because of us or because of the delegations that have reasonably pointed out the dangers of the new ideas some have attempted to include in this draft decision. On the contrary, we are ready to repeat last year's exercise – establish the four subsidiary bodies on the core issues – and could even be flexible and agree to work with special coordinators on the new issues, although that is still a departure, for which we have heard no satisfactory explanation, from the practice we had agreed on last year.

Let all of us who are interested in working on the genuinely substantive matters dealt with by the Conference on Disarmament adopt a decision similar to last year's, but without having it depend on mysterious, obscure and new proposals whose scope and immediate consequences are unclear. Let's put what you are proposing on hold. Let's ask ourselves whether, if we really want to work on substantive issues, it doesn't make sense simply to think about the way we did substantive work last year – a way on which there was consensus – and then to look at the issue of coordinators and the schedule of work and see whether a substantive discussion of procedure is warranted.

In fact, we stated at previous meetings that we had no objection to participating in meetings on procedural matters, since Cuba supports expanding the membership of the Conference and could also support an improvement in its methods of work, provided that the Conference's rules of procedure are respected and that the Conference is not used, as we have seen at meeting after meeting, to trample on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations or as a tool for making decisions whose sole aims are to meddle in the internal affairs of States and devalue the principle of sovereign equality. We are not the ones who stand up and leave the Conference on Disarmament when someone who disagrees with us speaks; on the contrary, we listen carefully.

I think, then, that to build trust, we must be totally transparent and not cross, I say again, not cross the red lines it has been clear from the start we have to draw. We are perfectly willing to work as we did last year, but we will not accept the promotion of initiatives, in the Conference on Disarmament no less, that serve to violate the Charter of the United Nations. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of Mexico.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the work you have been doing at the head of the Conference on Disarmament, the interest you have shown in seeking consensus and the transparent manner in which you have conducted all these discussions. My delegation is sincerely grateful, as you were not only open and inclusive but also heedful of all concerns in your bid to bring all members to an agreement.

Certainly, as I think everyone knows, my delegation has concerns for reasons other than those we have been hearing throughout this afternoon's discussion; we have always believed – and here we agree with the Cuban delegation – that the mandate of this Conference is the negotiation of legally binding instruments. That is the primary objective that we must pursue. We have all been working on innovative ideas to get to that point but have not succeeded. However, Mexico is also aware that, if it is not through dialogue, if it is not through consensus-building, we will not be able to reach the point we all want to reach, above all in such a complex international situation. I would simply like to state for the record that, despite my delegation's reservations, it was willing to go along with the consensus in adopting this decision, because we have always shown the flexibility needed to build consensus.

We also see the appointment of the coordinators – especially to see how to improve working methods and on the expansion of the membership – as an important part of this decision. Why have we always said that there is a fundamental problem in the Conference on Disarmament, the problem that keeps us from moving towards the negotiation of legally binding instruments? Part of the reason is the dynamic that characterizes our work, the procedures under which we operate. There is excessive micromanagement of everyone's work, we cannot move forward under this dynamic, and the fact that this decision covers these issues is, for us, a step forward.

We would like to emphasize that part of what is mentioned is to carry out consultations with member States. We are aware that no progress will be made without consensus, but we believe that this is a good start. In this regard, I would simply like to reiterate that, although for Mexico it is very important to begin the real work of the Conference on Disarmament and stop the pretending that does us all so much harm, we do see that in your draft the decision made today is very important, as basically it will determine whether we continue engaging in dialogue, whether we are going to continue working to reach the agreements that will enable us to negotiate legally binding instruments or whether we are simply going to continue with discussions like those of past weeks, if not even more highly politicized. What my delegation would like is dialogue on matters of substance. We believe that procedural issues should now take second place, and that is why we were prepared to support the draft decision that you submitted. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Mexico for her statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lee Jang-keun (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I, too, would like to join others in thanking you and your team for the hard work you have done to make progress in our collective endeavour – to revive this body and maintain the slow momentum we have painstakingly built over the past two years or more. I would like to commend you for your excellent stewardship in chairing this group in a very balanced, transparent, flexible and very professional way.

As my delegation made clear at Tuesday's meeting, we support your draft decision, as orally amended, and are ready to join the consensus in order to help ensure that this body makes progress. However, listening to the statements from the various delegations – and even though I fully understand their situation, their positions and their understanding of the draft – I cannot but say that it is somewhat frustrating and disturbing that our collective efforts for the past four or eight weeks, under your presidency and the Ukrainian presidency, seem to be coming to an end, in vain. I would like to avoid the word "failure", but despite all these tremendous efforts that you, Mr. President, and many of us, the delegations, have

made to come up with an agreement – we member States are near consensus – it seems that we are again on the verge of failure, disappointing not only ourselves but also the whole international community, which is expecting us to do at least a little.

I am somewhat frustrated, and not just because we are failing to achieve consensus and establish our workplan for this year; I am somewhat more frustrated because I cannot imagine what will be next if we fail to adopt this minimum draft decision to take our work forward. If we fail to do that, I feel that we will be trapped in an endless vicious cycle from which we – maybe all of us – cannot get out. It might not be just a matter of time that was wasted, but also money that was paid by our own taxpayers. But, again, pessimism might not be a wise answer – we might still try our best to stick to optimism for our collective future. My delegation is ready and willing to work with you and other colleagues and delegations and friends in building our collective future and to revive the body to which we all belong. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Takamizawa (Japan): Thank you, Mr. President, for your hard work and your team's effort; I believe that you have proceeded transparently and that your approach a very inclusive one.

Having heard the discussions in the room, I am increasingly aware of the importance of the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament. And I am wondering how that goal can be achieved without having subsidiary bodies. That is what the Presidents have to think over, and all States parties should be thinking of how to ensure the effective functioning of the Conference. Without referring to the subsidiary bodies or the working group on the way ahead, our plenary meetings have seen a lot of very interactive discussion in the past, on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, on missiles and on many other issues, including the programme of work. What I really hope, then, is that incoming presidencies set out a clear plan for their four-week presidency, so that member States can prepare for and discuss the substantive topics. I think that is the only way that we can get out of this stalemate. But, again, I would like to note that if we cannot agree to build on and deepen the work we did last year, we are not making progress. We can work on a value-added basis, but if we continue to follow that path, then we will not be able to achieve consensus and will not be able to move forward.

To conclude, I call on the coming presidencies to be transparent and predictable enough for us to work hard in the Conference. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his statement. I give the floor once more to the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. There have been some statements here that have made us think even more and come to the even firmer conclusion that the draft decision we have been presented is not yet ripe. We listened very carefully, for example, to the lengthy statement by the delegation of the Russian Federation on a set of substantive issues relating to the political, philosophical and diplomatic role of the Conference on Disarmament and the issues it works on. As it was so exhaustive, it seems to us we could not but welcome its introduction of important points to consider.

We then listened very carefully to the statement made by the delegation of Cuba, which referred to procedural issues – and I congratulate the Cuban delegation for having reviewed the rules and regulations on a number of issues considered here and for having considered matters of substance regarding the draft decision. We have also followed with great interest the statements made by the delegations of Syria and Iran, which is why, after these four statements, we will make only a few brief comments. We will begin by stating, clearly and decisively, that we do not believe that there are any countries here that have doubts about the President's intentions. The Venezuelan delegation at least does not have any. On the contrary, we have recognized time and again the objectivity and the transparency with which the President has acted in his attempts to accommodate the views expressed by delegations.

In the particular case of Venezuela, we have had two meetings with the President, and he has listened to us with great respect. We have raised with him, in a very specific way, concerns that he told us he was going to keep in mind and discuss with others. We have no doubt that the President held those discussions and came to the conclusion that he has to come to, because while the President obviously has a framework of autonomy to operate within, he or she must above all take the opinions of all his interlocutors into account. Having said that, I would like to reiterate that my delegation was of the view that the document containing the draft decision is a good starting point for reaching agreement, for arriving at a consensus. And we have said as much in previous meetings. Our preference was to consider a programme of work and commence negotiations without delay, although we could support the creation of the subsidiary bodies on the understanding that they are or could be a tool for achieving the ultimate objective, which is none other than for the Conference to resume substantive work. We also proposed – a proposal that, regrettably, was not accepted – that a subsidiary body be created to look at emerging issues and new technologies: in other words, that there be five subsidiary bodies, not four.

We stated that appointing a special coordinator was not the most appropriate means of improving the functioning and effectiveness of the Conference and breaking the deadlock, as such an appointment would raise doubts, above all because there have been delegations here that have said openly that the proposed review of the effectiveness and membership of the Conference has political aims. We have warned those delegations that the failure of similar initiatives shows that, in effect, no review of the working methods can guarantee an end to the deadlock in the absence of the necessary political will. So what is the added value of adopting, once again, a strategy that has proven ineffective?

The mandate given to the so-called special coordinator to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the Conference and examine the question of its membership, as has been said by other delegations, is still too ambiguous and open to misinterpretation. In that regard, and in the interest of making a proposal that would help us reach an agreement, the Venezuelan delegation echoed proposals by other delegations for several possible courses of action. I do not want to repeat here what we have said on several occasions, including to the President: namely, that the draft decision should be split into two parts, one concerning the five subsidiary bodies, including one on emerging issues and new technologies and another on the appointment of the special coordinator to examine ways to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the Conference and the question of expanding its membership. It could also be split into a decision creating the five subsidiary bodies, including one on emerging technology issues, another on the appointment of a special coordinator to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the membership and a third identifying persons who would serve as coordinators of the subsidiary bodies or the special coordinator.

These suggestions were made with the sole purpose of helping find a path that would allow us to reach a consensus, and the countries that had doubts about any aspect of those suggestions were able to express them. As the draft now before us shows, no such path could be found, and as the draft decision does not include the suggestions made by our delegation and other delegations, we, like other delegations, are unable to join the consensus.

We hope that the holders of the upcoming presidencies will be able to exert their authority legitimately, fully and in accordance with the fundamental principles of international law and that there will be no attempts to sabotage the presidency and its work, as has happened in the past. Let's hope that the forthcoming presidencies can facilitate further discussions on the issues at hand. I say, once again, that Venezuela has the political will to help the Conference on Disarmament fulfil its role as the sole negotiating forum for disarmament issues. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Venezuela for his statement and give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mahomed (South Africa): Thank you Mr. President. We would like to recognize the Director-General. I would also like to express our sincere appreciation for the

way that you have been discharging your responsibilities. You have been professional, transparent and serious, and we would like to commend you.

Let me start by stating that the adoption of a decision cannot be equated with the adoption of a programme of work. My delegation previously indicated that we are supportive of all efforts to get the Conference on Disarmament back to work and to pave the way towards negotiations. I would like to reiterate very strongly that the primary responsibility of each Conference session is to adopt a programme of work with a view to commencing substantive work. But we all have to demonstrate flexibility. We believe that the requests from many delegations that took the floor earlier for more time to study the draft decision are justified. There are still so many questions that remain unanswered, particularly regarding the scope and mandate of the special coordinator on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. Many delegations, even up to today, also raised other issues of substance that they feel will improve the decision.

My delegation raised the issue previously in terms of the effective functioning of the Conference, and we need answers in order to make an informed decision. We are, as our colleague from Cuba earlier said, very hesitant to sign a blank cheque. We would therefore argue strongly in favour of more time to allow for answers to the questions raised not only by us but also by many other delegations.

South Africa's opinion on the subsidiary bodies is well known, but as I said earlier, we all have to demonstrate a certain degree of flexibility. In the spirit of compromise, Mr. President, if we have to argue for more time in order to discuss the draft decision, maybe it is something that we also need to seriously consider. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa for his statement and give the floor to the Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Herráiz España (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation, of course, joins the delegations that have thanked and congratulated you for the efforts you have made over the past few weeks to bring a programme of work to a successful conclusion. We also welcome the presence of our Director-General this afternoon. The truth, Mr. President, is that, for years, the work of the Conference on Disarmament has always had to be approached flexibly, constructively and with political will, and I believe that this is particularly urgent, because we are all aware of the troubling security situation, the well-known tensions affecting strategic stability, the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the urgent calls for action by our Conference. The list is very long, and it goes without saying that our technical discussions are within the scope of our mandate, which is, of course, to negotiate legally binding treaties.

Before us today we have a document in which it is proposed simply that we hold technical discussions on a number of issues on the classic agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. One of the issues, emerging technologies and new threats, as it happens, lends itself to being considered not by a subsidiary body but by a special coordinator. Well, whether that issue is considered by a coordinator or a subsidiary body should in no way cause us to contest the relevance of the proposed plan of work. Others may well have wanted that issue to be considered by a subsidiary body. I think that we all have to understand that we are not always going to like everything about everything, and here we come to the sensitive issue that is the focus of attention today: namely, the appointment of a coordinator to examine working methods. The coordinator's mandate will also be to consider the expansion of the Conference and look into ways of enhancing the Conference's effectiveness.

I wonder which delegation could object to an analysis, carried out in good faith, transparently and objectively, of how best to discuss the enhanced efficiency of the Conference on Disarmament. I believe that the discussions to be held by the special coordinator will afford all delegations, all of them, the opportunity to express the views they find most appropriate.

I am therefore of the view that we must not be prejudiced or biased against these kinds of discussion and that they must be conducted with the necessary transparency and

objectivity. We will thus be able to give the Conference a job this session. Otherwise, I wonder what we will be able to achieve, what alternatives we have if the programme of work does not go ahead. Perhaps the forthcoming presidencies can get it done. But I believe that the urgency of our undertaking our mission in the Conference should certainly allow your proposal to go forward. That is what my delegation would like. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Spain for his statement. I recognize the Ambassador of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo Miño (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I welcome, first of all, the Director-General's presence. At this point in the debate, and given the circumstances, I have a very short and very specific statement. My delegation believes that the document put before us reflects considerable efforts to reconcile the different views expressed in the meetings you have chaired. In my delegation's view, the draft decision was therefore an important tool for getting the Conference on Disarmament back to work. It is clear, however, that the political will to adopt it is lacking. It has been pointed out on several occasions that it is urgent for the Conference, the sole forum for disarmament negotiations, to make progress on its substantive work. It is therefore our responsibility to take measures that will make it possible to move forward with the work and find a way out of the paralysis that has affected the Conference for too long.

Mr. President, we believe that during your presidency the discussions have been channelled in the right direction, so we congratulate you again for the superb, highly professional and transparent way in which you have conducted these discussions. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Ecuador for his statement.

Ladies and gentlemen, I see no more requests for the floor, so let me say what happens next. Over the last four weeks, I have worked intensively to try to achieve the best possible balance between the different interests represented in this room. I have been clear – and many delegations have been clear – that the second presidency was the opportune time to do this and that we wanted to try to find a way of structuring our work for this year by the end of the United Kingdom presidency.

I said last week that I intended to take action this week on the basis of the balanced draft that we have produced, which, as I say, I believe represents the best possible – perhaps the only possible – way of structuring our work this year. On Tuesday, I asked delegations to seek their final instructions for action today. On the basis of some amendments which were proposed from the floor on Tuesday, I circulated yesterday those oral amendments, as a courtesy to delegations, to facilitate our conversation today, and I regret that courtesy has not been taken by some delegations in the spirit in which it was intended.

This morning, I tabled the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.619/rev.2, as orally amended, and I said that our decision was about whether we collectively wish to use 2019 to build on and deepen the work we did last year or not. I have listened carefully to the debate this afternoon and by my count there are at least seven delegations that cannot join consensus on this draft, so I have to take it that the answer is that we do not.

Distinguished colleagues, I am disappointed for the sake of the Conference on Disarmament that we could not collectively agree to continue substantive discussions in the subsidiary bodies this year. We have lost the momentum we built up last year. To those delegations that were ready to join consensus, I apologize that your efforts were in vain. But I thank you for your flexibility and your readiness to compromise for the greater good of laying the groundwork for future negotiations in this body.

I would now like to give the floor to our Secretary-General, Mr. Møller.

Mr. Møller (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament): Thank you, Mr. President.

I regret very much that the draft decision could not be adopted today. It is, of course, your sovereign right and your sovereign decision, but one that I fear will erode even further

the trust that the world has in the ability of the Conference on Disarmament to do the job that it was created for.

Last year, the work of the subsidiary bodies was timely and substantive. The depth of the discussions that took place in the subsidiary bodies confirmed the importance of honing and building on the extraordinary knowledge in this multilateral forum to further discussions on issues of existential importance to the States members of this Conference. The establishment of subsidiary bodies on the Conference's four core agenda items, as well as the two special coordinators, would have offered valuable opportunities for the Conference to continue the substantive work started last year and look into other topical areas, such as emerging issues and new technologies, improved and effective functioning of the Conference, and the expansion of the membership.

Emerging issues and new technologies are revolutionizing our lives; not discussing their impact on the agenda of the Conference is frankly anachronistic and does not serve humanity well. Discussions on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference have taken place over the years. The appointment of a special coordinator would have been a positive signal in support of discussion and exchange of opinions on issues that affect the day-to-day functioning of our Conference. It goes without saying that the expansion of the membership of the Conference needs to be, at a minimum, discussed. Review of the membership of the Conference at regular intervals stems from the rules of procedure.

However, having said all that, the Conference remains a tool at the disposal of its member States, which they will use in any manner they see fit. And while, as I said, I regret today's outcome, I reassure you, as the Secretary-General of the Conference, of my personal support and that of the secretariat for your important work.

As a last point, I take this opportunity to convey to you that I intend to organize, following requests from both civil society and you, a fourth Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum later in the year. I will reach out to you in the next few weeks via the secretariat with suggestions in terms of format, content and resource persons to make this event an opportunity for dialogue and interaction that can usefully enrich our work and your work. And I look forward to your comments and suggestions, so that we can craft a useful and forward-looking event.

Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement and indeed for his continued support to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Dear colleagues, the next plenary meeting will take place on Tuesday, 19 March 2019, under the presidency of the United States of America, and I recognize the Ambassador of the United States of America. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. First, I wish to commend you and your delegation for the tireless efforts you put in to reach agreement on a decision to move the Conference on Disarmament forward. Unfortunately, that was not to be. But you and your team deserve to be proud of all the work that you have done.

Regarding the United States presidency, my team and I plan to consult with key member States to see if there is a possibility of finding elements which could form the basis of a programme of work. I know this will not be easy, but it is my obligation to try.

The first event of the United States presidency will be an address to the Conference by the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Dr. Yleem D.S. Poblete, on Tuesday, 19 March, at 10 a.m. Immediately prior to that address, I will outline for the Conference the other meetings and activities and schedule for the remainder of the United States presidency.

Once again, Mr. President, thank you for your efforts and those of the other members of your delegation to try to get the Conference back to work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his statement and his kind words and assure him and his delegation of our full support as he assumes the duties of President of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished delegates, that concludes our business for today, and indeed, the business of the United Kingdom's presidency of the Conference. It has been an honour for the United Kingdom to assume the presidency of this body, and mostly a pleasure. Allow me to thank you all for your support during the last four weeks. I would also like to place on record my sincere thanks to my colleagues in the secretariat, to the Conference officers and to our excellent interpreters for their unfailing support for our work.

Before I conclude, I recognize the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Mr. President, despite the deeply disappointing outcome, you and your team deserve a round of applause.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for her kind gesture.

Ladies and gentlemen, the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.