

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

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President: Mr. Robert A. Wood(United States of America)
later: Ms. Cynthia Plath.....(United States of America)



The President: Good morning, everyone. I call to order the 1497th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, allow me at the beginning of the United States presidency to thank Ambassador Klymenko and Ambassador Liddle and their teams for their efforts on the draft programme of work and on the establishment of the subsidiary bodies respectively.

As I said last Thursday, the United States regrets that this body was unable to adopt a draft decision to establish substantive subsidiary bodies and special coordinators to explore issues related to the Conference's working methods and membership expansion, despite the United Kingdom's tireless and commendable efforts to reach consensus.

Distinguished colleagues, the United States welcomes this opportunity to assume the presidency of the Conference. As the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, this body has a role to play in shaping a safer, more secure world. In order to get to work, however, we have to overcome our current impasse.

Through our presidency, the United States seeks to advance meaningful, transparent, substantive real-world discussions on disarmament challenges directly impacting our collective ability to make progress on the Conference's mandate to negotiate legally binding instruments. While we intend to fulfil our obligation as President to continue consultations on a programme of work, we will also devote our plenary meetings to substantive themes germane to the Conference.

Today, United States Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Dr. Yleem D.S. Poblete, will address the Conference on substantive challenges facing arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. In week two, we will tackle the topic of creating the environment for nuclear disarmament. Week three will focus on the role of deterrence, an important disarmament issue that is rarely addressed in the Conference. We will conclude our fourth week with a plenary meeting devoted to transparency.

We plan to have one plenary meeting per week, although more can be scheduled as needed, and intend to invite a variety of speakers from the United States delegation and from other Conference delegations to engage this body on these topics. Our intent is to tap into the richness of expertise, diversity of views and vast institutional knowledge that exist right here within this room and in this body, so that we can all contribute to frank, substantive and fruitful discussions.

During next week's plenary meeting, which will take place on 26 March at 3 p.m., we will be joined by United States Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Non-Proliferation, Christopher Ford. Conference Ambassadors from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Brazil have kindly agreed to add their views to the discussion to help ensure robust engagement. The speakers will deliver their remarks, followed by an open discussion from the floor. We are still finalizing details for the third and fourth weeks and will keep you apprised of these developments. We look forward to a productive presidency that addresses pertinent global disarmament issues and hope that our substantive discussions can advance efforts to lead to disarmament progress.

I would now like to briefly suspend the meeting to welcome Her Excellency Yleem D.S. Poblete, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance at the United States Department of State.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome Dr. Yleem D.S. Poblete, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance at the United States Department of State. Madam Secretary, you have the floor.

Ms. Poblete (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. Ambassador Wood, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to thank you for the opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament during its first plenary meeting under the presidency of my country, the United States of America. We

look forward to following in the able footsteps of our esteemed colleagues from the United Kingdom and Ukraine to further guide the work of this body in very difficult times.

Mr. President, as the only standing multilateral forum for negotiating arms-control and disarmament agreements, the Conference, along with its predecessors, has achieved such important agreements in its 40 years as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention, the latter of which includes detailed verification provisions negotiated in Geneva.

But those were different times. Today, we must confront the vexing reality that the Conference has fallen into deadlock. Only twice in the past two decades has the Conference even been able to reach consensus, briefly, on a programme of work including actual negotiations. This is deeply regrettable and represents a squandering of this body's potential.

Some blame this protracted stalemate on strained relations between member States, disagreement among member States on the Conference's prioritization of issues or attempts by some countries to link progress in one area to progress in other areas. The hard truth is that this impasse is due to member States' lack of political will to take tough stances and make tough decisions.

We see, time and again, some States using the Conference as a platform to posture and promote agendas that are antithetical to the rules-based international order, yet they go largely unchallenged.

Others may occupy their chairs merely as a means to stake a claim to legitimacy for their regimes where none otherwise exists – lashing out when their credibility is questioned over chemical weapons use, treaty violations, support for terrorism and other destabilizing activities.

Recently, many Conference member States expressed a willingness to explore the Conference's working methods and rules of procedure to determine whether targeted adjustments or strategic modifications aimed at better reflecting today's needs and threats would have the power to unlock blockages. Any such changes would need to be carefully thought through, but along these lines, member States could explore topics ranging from presidency rotation practice to presidency criteria. One thing is certain: if the Conference remains deadlocked, it will lose credibility, fail to contribute to international security and risk fading into irrelevance.

Mr. President, as the world comes together in forums such as the Conference, it is important that we recognize that, one, disarmament does not occur in a vacuum and, two, that effective verification, compliance and enforcement are vital components in any successful arms-control or disarmament initiative, particularly when some parties may lack respect for the rule of law, do not value transparency and resort to threats at home and abroad when challenged.

We must remember that arms control is a means to an end, not a means or an end unto itself. When applied in a verifiable and enforceable manner, arms control can help to manage strategic competition among States and contribute to security and stability. Moreover, by reducing the risks of miscalculation, arms control can indeed serve the interests of all parties to an agreement. But these benefits are diluted or lost when States do not comply with their obligations or adhere to their commitments.

Wishful thinking is no substitute for vigilance, and hope cannot be allowed to replace rigour. Non-compliance and blatant disregard for international norms must be dutifully and thoroughly reviewed, documented, assessed and addressed. Violations and malign actions by rogue regimes and other States around the globe only serve to increase tensions.

As United States President Donald Trump has asserted, "for arms control to effectively contribute to national security, all parties must faithfully implement their obligations". Accountability is critical.

Now let me highlight a few specific examples. Russia has invaded neighbouring countries and attempted to annex part of a neighbour's territory. Russia's aggressive actions

in Europe and its disregard for basic international principles have strained the key pillars of European security architecture.

Moscow's continued aggression cannot go unchecked. That is why, just last week, the United States, together with the European Union and Canada, imposed sanctions on those individuals who orchestrated the brazen and unprovoked attack on three Ukrainian naval vessels near the Kerch Strait last November.

The United States also took action against Russian individuals and entities involved in Moscow's illicit activities in Ukraine and Crimea. We urge all responsible nations to stand with us, united in the face of Russian aggression.

Russia's destabilizing activity seeks to play spoiler in efforts to achieve and maintain global stability while enabling its contemporary revisionist geopolitical ambitions. As the United States has repeatedly said, we must view Russian behaviour in its entirety in order to understand its gravity: from ongoing compliance issues relating to conventional arms-control instruments and a record of biological weapons that raises significant concerns regarding Biological Weapons Convention compliance, an ongoing diplomatic campaign to undermine the application of state-of-the-art nuclear safeguards methodologies and attempts to sweep a client State's safeguards non-compliance under the rug at the International Atomic Energy Agency to its violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention and even its use of chemical weapons on the territory of another State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and its obfuscation of the abhorrent use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own people.

Russia's non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was negotiated here in the Conference, confirms long-held concerns regarding Russia's chemical weapons programme. In March 2018, only months after claiming to have completed the destruction of its declared chemical weapons stockpile – for which, I should add, the United States and others contributed well over a billion dollars in assistance to the Russian Federation – Russia used an undeclared and unscheduled military-grade nerve agent in an assassination attempt on Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom's investigation into the assassination attempt concluded that Russian nationals were responsible for the attack and that these individuals are officers from the Russian military intelligence service, also known as the GRU. The same agent used in Salisbury led to the loss of life of a United Kingdom citizen in Amesbury, the United Kingdom. Russia's use of this nerve agent in Salisbury clearly demonstrates what we already have assessed: that Russia has not met its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and maintains a covert chemical weapons programme, in clear violation of article I of the Convention.

Furthermore, Russia continues its support for and defence of the Assad regime's brutal tactics against its own people, including the use of starve-and-surrender tactics, barrel bombs and chemical weapons.

Russia agreed to act as a guarantor of the Assad regime's compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention in the 2013 Geneva agreement yet has attempted to undermine every effort responsible nations have undertaken to address this unacceptable situation. Russia must be held accountable for flouting its international obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and for supporting the brutal actions of the Assad regime.

Of course, Russia's backing of the Assad regime does not end with its cover-up of chemical weapons use; it extends to Russia's attempts to sweep under the rug Syria's ongoing violation of its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards obligations.

Regrettably, the regime in Damascus is not the only odious regime Russia supports. It also provides aid and comfort to the brutal Maduro regime in Venezuela, a subject on which I will have more to say later.

With respect to Russia and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the bottom line is that Russia has developed, produced, flight-tested and fielded a ground-launched cruise missile, known as the SSC-8 or 9M729, with a range capability of between 500 and 5,500 kilometres, in violation of the Treaty. Russia began the covert development of the SSC-8, probably by the mid-2000s, but it is today producing this system and has already deployed multiple battalions. To be clear, the SSC-8 represents a material breach of the Treaty that Russia intended to keep secret. The United States finding is not based on a misunderstanding of this system or of its capabilities. Russia is fielding an illegal missile and lying about it.

In response, like-minded States have come together to call out Russia's violation and demand that it returns to effective, verifiable compliance. The Russian Federation's violation of the Treaty poses a direct threat to European, United States, East Asian and global security. It is destabilizing and has a corrosive effect on arms control and disarmament.

On the sidelines of the meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ministers for foreign affairs on 4 December 2018, Secretary of State Pompeo declared the Russian Federation to be in material breach of its obligations under the Treaty, and stated: "Russia's actions gravely undermine American national security interests and that of our allies and partners. It makes no sense for the United States to remain in a treaty that constrains our ability to respond to Russia's violations."

Then, on 1 February of this year, Secretary Pompeo announced that the United States would suspend its obligations under the Treaty on 2 February, as a remedy for Russia's material breach, and would provide Treaty parties with six-month notice of United States withdrawal from the Treaty pursuant to article XV, unless Russia returns to full and verifiable compliance.

The Russian response has been a combination of deliberate disinformation, counter-allegations to sow confusion and also open threats against the United States, its allies and partners. Open threats.

While we judge that Russia remains in compliance with the New START Treaty, the Russian leader, just weeks after the central limits on each country's strategic nuclear arsenal under that treaty took effect, proudly said in his 1 March 2018 address to the Federal Assembly that Russia was developing advanced nuclear weapons such as a nuclear-powered cruise missile and a nuclear-armed underwater drone. Are these the actions of a responsible stakeholder? Russian strategy and doctrine emphasize the potential coercive and military uses of nuclear weapons.

And, finally, in addition to our examples about the Chemical Weapons Convention and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty violations, Russia publicly boasts about its development of anti-satellite weapons at the same time that it purports to be and proclaims that it is the leading supporter of preventing an arms race in outer space.

How can we trust Russian arms-control efforts and the Russians' seriousness about preventing an arms race in outer space when they have touted the development and completion of a broad array of counterspace capabilities, to include ground-launched anti-satellite missiles and various lasers intended to blind or damage satellites?

Their intended targets, meanwhile, are used for beneficial purposes, such as remote sensing, global navigation systems and strategic stability, including nuclear command and control and missile-warning systems.

Just last March, the Russian leader announced a new ground-based laser system that is designed to "fight satellites in orbit". The United States believes that this system is designed, at a minimum, to disrupt the normal functioning of remote-sensing satellites. If this laser can disrupt the normal functioning of a satellite, then it could be a circumvention of the provisions of the Russians' own draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space.

Again, how are we supposed to believe that Russia seeks to prevent the use of these self-proclaimed weapons in accordance with its draft Treaty, when the Russian leader in

2012 said that space weapons “will be comparable to nuclear weapons in terms of the results of their utilization but are more acceptable in the political and military respect”? Let’s process that statement.

Furthermore, how can we believe that the Russian Federation is serious about preventing an arms race in outer space when the Russians are the ones who are developing ground-launched anti-satellite weapons that would not be prohibited by their own draft Treaty?

Even today, the Russian Federation is testing, using and publicizing counterspace capabilities. For example, last August, when I addressed the Conference, I mentioned that the Russians conducted questionable activities in outer space that, to many observers, may have demonstrated disruptive behaviour that would be prohibited by the draft Treaty. Couple this with the Russians’ public statements on weaponization, such as a statement from 2018 in which the Russian Space Force Commander said that the “main task” of the space troops is to “assimilate the new prototypes of weapons and military equipment in the Space Forces’ military units”. This also applies to the Group of Governmental Experts on further effective measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which is currently meeting just down the hall from here.

Russia is not a responsible actor that intends to uphold its obligations under arms-control and disarmament agreements. “When treaties are broken”, as Secretary of State Pompeo said to a gathering at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, “the violators must be confronted, and the treaties must be fixed or discarded. Words must mean something.” And accountability is critical.

Turning to Syria and the atrocities committed by the Assad regime – the United States is appalled by the repeated and reprehensible use of chemical weapons in Syria by the Assad regime. Syria has used chemical weapons every single year since acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) – United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism confirmed Syria’s culpability in four specific cases before its mandate expired due to continued Russian vetoes.

We are united with responsible nations in condemning, in the strongest possible terms, all use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the 7 April 2018 attack in Duma. In this regard, we further support the recent report by the OPCW fact-finding mission, which determined that there were reasonable grounds to believe that chlorine was used as a chemical weapon in the attack. The conclusions in the fact-finding mission’s report support what the United States determined in its own technical assessment of the attack last April. That is, that the Assad regime is responsible for this heinous chemical weapons attack that killed and injured civilians.

The use of chemical weapons by Syria, a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, is a breach of the Convention and constitutes a threat to international peace and security. It directly undermines the international norms against chemical weapons use. There can be no impunity, no impunity, for such crimes. Those responsible have to be held accountable.

The United States welcomes the June 2018 decision of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons use in Syria. We call on all responsible States to support OPCW in the successful implementation of these arrangements.

The United States further encourages the Security Council and OPCW to recognize the findings of the seventh Joint Investigative Mechanism report of 26 October 2017 and to take steps to ensure that the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks are held accountable.

Moreover, we urge Syria to meet its obligations under the Convention, to finally provide a complete declaration to OPCW, to desist from further use of chemical weapons, to destroy, under international verification, all such weapons and their precursor chemicals and to cooperate fully with the OPCW investigation and mechanism.

The United States further calls on all States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to ensure that they do not contribute to the proliferation of chemical weapons in Syria or elsewhere. We reiterate that any further use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime will be met with a swift response.

We also call upon the Syrian regime to cooperate fully and immediately with the International Atomic Energy Agency to answer the long-standing and unresolved questions regarding its nuclear programme, including by granting the Agency access to all information, all sites, material and persons necessary to resolve questions about its undeclared plutonium production reactor, which it was building with assistance from North Korea.

Turning to Iran, the United States remains gravely concerned by Iran's missile programme. Iran possesses the largest missile arsenal in the region and it is actively increasing the accuracy and lethality of its missile systems. Iran's ballistic missile activities and its efforts to develop space-launch vehicles are in defiance of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015).

Iran's missile programme is a key contributor to increased tensions and destabilization in the region, increasing the risk of a regional arms race. Iran must immediately cease activities related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Iran must halt the proliferation of missiles and missile technology to terror groups and other non-State actors.

From Lebanon to Syria to Yemen, Iran's malign influence is spreading throughout the region. Just look at its support to groups like Hezbollah or the Houthis in Yemen. Iran has provided ballistic missiles to the Houthis that have been fired into Saudi Arabia, and unmanned aerial systems to Houthi groups that enable long-range, indiscriminate strikes against land-based targets in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Iranian regime is also responsible for the massive build-up and increased sophistication of Hezbollah's rocket and missile arsenals.

The United States is committed to aggressively countering Iran's regional proliferation of ballistic missiles and its unlawful arms transfers. We will ensure international restrictions on Iranian missiles and conventional arms do not expire. The United States urges all responsible nations also to take all necessary steps to implement Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) restrictions on transfer of missile-related technologies to Iran. Furthermore, Governments must take concrete measures to prevent individuals and entities operating within their jurisdictions from supporting Iran's missile programmes. In this context, I want to underscore the outsized role an individual can play in supporting proliferation.

Li Fangwei, better known as Karl Lee, is a China-based broker for Iran's missile programme. Karl Lee has supplied Iran with a range of materials to construct ballistic missiles over the past decade. Over that same decade, China has refused to take concrete actions to put Karl Lee out of business once and for all. This is just one example of Iran's worldwide procurement network.

Let me be clear about our commitment to disrupting Iran's missile-related acquisitions. The United States will use all available authorities, including sanctions, to disrupt Iran's procurement networks and brokers like Karl Lee, wherever they are located.

The United States has also had long-standing concerns that Iran maintains a chemical weapons programme that it has failed to declare to OPCW. Iran's non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention is clear, and permit me to enumerate them: first, Iran has failed to declare past chemical weapons transfers. Second, it has failed to fully declare its complete holdings of riot-control agents, and, third, Iran's non-compliance includes the failure to declare its complete chemical weapons production facility activities. Furthermore, the United States is gravely concerned that Iran is pursuing pharmaceutical-based agents for offensive purposes.

These efforts are especially concerning because the Iranian regime is the world's leading State sponsor of terrorism and remains the most significant challenge to Middle East peace and stability. We call on Iran to fully declare its chemical weapons programme

and to abide by its international obligations as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Now let us recall Iran's intervention in the Conference on Disarmament on 27 February, when it presented itself as a model of diplomatic decorum yet, in the same breath, asserted to a room full of diplomats that it would never apologize for taking American diplomats hostage.

Iran was making a reference to a grim period, a grim historical event that was a barbarous affront to the basic principles of humanity and diplomatic decorum, but it is something that the Iranian regime apparently remains shamefully proud of today.

The Iranian regime continues this abhorrent practice of taking foreign hostages – many currently languish in Iran's notorious prisons. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has called on Iran to release those wrongfully detained, including Americans Robert Levinson, Xiyue Wang, Baquer Namazi and Siamak Namazi. This is not a laughing matter. These are innocents being taken hostage by the Iranian regime.

I would like to turn our attention now to China, a strategic competitor. While the United States has continued to reduce the number and salience of its nuclear weapons, other States, including China, have moved in the opposite direction.

Chinese military modernization remains centrally focused on establishing regional dominance in order to expand its ability to coerce United States allies, eventually pushing the United States out of the region and becoming a military Power capable of competing on the global stage. This modernization has resulted in an expanding and diverse nuclear force, with a new generation of delivery systems coming online as China works to establish a nuclear triad dispersed across land, sea and air platforms, including next-generation missiles and a stealthy, long-range strategic bomber.

While China's nuclear declaratory policy has not changed, its lack of transparency regarding the scope and scale of its nuclear modernization programme is destabilizing, raising questions regarding its future intent, and challenges the atmosphere for progress on nuclear disarmament. Whereas in 2000 it was possible to report that China had only 18 DF-5 nuclear-armed, silo-based missiles, now, just 19 years later, we can say China has deployed approximately 125 nuclear-armed missiles. And that trend is hardly abating; China is engaging in an ongoing nuclear build-up.

China also engages in increasingly concerning behaviour in outer space. As a leading spacefaring nation, China continually calls for responsible use in space and co-sponsors the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, yet it continues to pursue anti-satellite capabilities.

As with Russia, it is difficult to determine the truthfulness of China's concern about the prevention of an arms race in space and its support for space arms control when it continues to pursue military capabilities such as jammers and directed-energy weapons; when it openly emphasizes the need for offensive cyberspace capabilities; when it demonstrates sophisticated on-orbit capabilities with the potential for dual uses; and when it has deployed an operational ground-based anti-satellite missile intended to target low-Earth-orbit satellites, with likely research on anti-satellite capabilities designed to threaten all orbits.

Now, despite their consistent vocal support for the draft Treaty, it is likely that the Chinese are preparing to use ground- and space-based counterspace capabilities, as emphasized by the Chinese President years ago, who told a military space-launch centre that it should "focus on military training and research and combat capabilities and integrate with the People's Liberation Army's joint operation system".

Ultimately, China's military modernization, which lacks transparency of both scope and intention, and its pursuit of regional dominance have emerged as major challenges to global peace and security. These developments have produced increased uncertainty and risk while demanding continued demonstration of our commitments to deterring such threats.

In the same region, I would like to turn to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Our stance is unwavering with regard to North Korea. North Korea must understand that the only way to achieve the security and development that it seeks is to abandon all its weapons of mass destruction, all its ballistic missile programmes, as numerous Security Council resolutions demand.

And to those countries that choose to maintain weapon- or military-related cooperation with North Korea, such activities must stop immediately. You, too, are violating Security Council resolutions that explicitly prohibit such transfers. The United States has been clear that it will not hesitate to sanction those individuals and entities that violate these resolutions.

Now to Venezuela – the former Maduro regime, aided and abetted by Russia and Cuba and China, has consistently used repressive tactics against democratic actors in Venezuela, including trying to silence Venezuela's National Assembly, the only democratically elected institution remaining in the country. More than 50 countries deemed Maduro's 10 January inauguration illegitimate, as it was based on May 2018 presidential elections that were neither free nor fair.

Venezuela's National Assembly declared the illegitimacy of the former Maduro regime. On 23 January, National Assembly President Juan Guaidó assumed the role of interim President of Venezuela in accordance with the country's Constitution.

The walkout by the Lima Group, the United States and other responsible nations in response to the former Maduro Government's representation here at the Conference on Disarmament on 26 February sent a strong message to the Venezuelan people and to the world of our joint commitment to liberty and to the rule of law.

Distinguished colleagues, history has shown that a regime that oppresses its people and blatantly disregards the rule of law at home also has contempt for international obligations and norms. That is why the United States hopes that President Guaidó's legitimate representative to the Conference will be in a position to assume the presidency when it rotates to Venezuela in May.

Mr. President, responsible States must be united and resolute in our efforts to hold violators accountable, and the Conference has an important role to play in this regard.

During the week of 25 February, this body heard minister after minister speak about the crucial role of the Conference, about challenges associated with a deteriorating security environment that the Conference needs to address and about the importance of respect for the rules-based order and treaty compliance. Ministers also called on member States to refrain from politicizing the Conference, and some suggested that a lack of political will is to blame for the Conference's stalemate.

Permit me to talk briefly on these last two points – politicization and political will. Three particular Conference delegations dedicated their time to lecturing responsible Conference members on maintaining professionalism. The three delegations were Iran, the Maduro-backed Venezuela and Russia. Take a moment to let that sink in: Iran, the Maduro regime in Venezuela and the Russian Federation.

Today's prevailing security conditions must be taken into account when considering disarmament measures. The influence and actions of rogue regimes, desperate to retain power, thwart our efforts in bodies such as this one.

The United States therefore calls on the Conference to muster the political will necessary to confront these malign actors and to hold them accountable. And we thank those nations that have had the courage to do so already.

Mr. President, the United States has in recent years been characterized as unilateralist and against arms control. But nothing, nothing, could be further from the truth, as has been demonstrated by our strict adherence to and compliance with a myriad of arms-control, non-proliferation and disarmament agreements, many of which I have cited today.

Let me reiterate: the United States remains committed to arms-control efforts and receptive to future arms-control negotiations if conditions permit. But we need willing,

reliable, responsible partners that will adhere to their obligations and commitments, that will be in full, verifiable compliance of their international obligations.

In conclusion, as the Conference marks this fortieth-year milestone, let us work together to build upon prior achievements and develop agreements that effectively address and counter threats to peace and security.

Thank you very much.

The President: I would like to thank Dr. Poblete for her statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Dr. Poblete from the chamber. My deputy will resume the meeting shortly and preside over the body in the role of the President on my behalf.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

Ms. Plath (United States of America) took the Chair.

The President: Dear colleagues, as Ambassador Wood mentioned, it is my intention this morning to open up the floor to delegations wishing to speak. I now turn the floor over to you. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Ukraine.

Mr. Klymenko (Ukraine): Thank you, Madam President. Since this is my first time taking the floor under your presidency, I would like to start by extending my warmest congratulations to you on the assumption of your duties and wishing you and your team every success in this challenging endeavour. Allow me also to convey our gratitude to the United States delegation for outlining its plans for its tenure in the third presidency, as well as for the unwavering solidarity with Ukraine against the backdrop of Russian aggression, as expressed in the statement delivered just now by Assistant Secretary of State Yleem Poblete.

Before I proceed, I would also like to use this opportunity to commend Ambassador Liddle of the United Kingdom and his team for the tireless efforts they made during the second presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in an attempt to pave the way towards a breakthrough in the Conference, as reflected in the very timely, appropriate and balanced initiative outlined in the document CD/WP.619/Rev.2.

Madam President, distinguished delegates, I have to highlight that the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is indeed of an ongoing nature. It has lasted for over five years. We continue to register deliberate shelling by Russian armed formations – including with weaponry prohibited by the Minsk agreements – of Ukrainian soil in the south-east of my country. Throughout the occupied parts of Donbass, aerial imagery available to the special monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe reveals the presence of dozens of multiple-launch rocket systems, tanks, mortars and self-propelled and towed artillery.

Furthermore, Russia continues to provide an uninterrupted resupply of weapons and ammunition to illegal armed groups operating in the south-east of Ukraine. We therefore once again urge Russia to cease these hostilities and implement in good faith its commitments on security aspects of the Minsk agreements.

Moreover, Russia has been carrying out progressive militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. These disruptive actions include destabilizing transfers by the Russians of weapon systems, in particular nuclear-capable aircraft and missiles, other weaponry, ammunition and military personnel, to the sovereign territory of Ukraine. Pursuant to the Agreement between Ukraine and the International Atomic Energy Agency for the application of safeguards in connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it is prohibited to deploy nuclear weapons anywhere in Ukraine or divert Ukrainian nuclear materials and facilities for military purposes. Therefore, Ukraine calls upon the international community to urge Russia to abstain from any actions connected with the violation of the nuclear-free status of the part of the territory of Ukraine, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Multiple military exercises by Russian armed forces in Crimea undermine regional security and entail considerable long-term negative environmental consequences in the

region. The Russian Federation's ongoing actions in parts of the Black Sea surrounding Crimea and the Sea of Azov, including their militarization, pose further threats to Ukraine and undermine stability in the broader context.

The international community continues to strongly condemn that dangerous increase, the intentions behind it and the unjustified use of force by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, including against three vessels of the naval forces of Ukraine on 25 November 2018 in the Black Sea. We welcome the decisions of the United States, the European Union, Canada and some other countries to launch a new Azov package of sanctions for the above-mentioned open and blatant act of armed aggression against my country.

Ukraine urges Russia to release the vessels, their 24 crew members and the equipment unconditionally and without delay. At this particular critical juncture, the strict implementation of General Assembly resolution 73/194 of 17 December 2018 entitled "Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov", is of paramount importance.

Madam President, distinguished delegates, in the current volatile security environment, we have to reflect carefully not only on our immediate duties to elaborate new international disarmament instruments but also on the state of adherence to existing relevant multilateral and normative mechanisms. These new instruments cannot be separated from the broader security context. Global security is unachievable without ensuring proper verification and implementation of existing disarmament and non-proliferation agreements.

Let us look at the current situation in this field. I was repeatedly outspoken in this chamber about the blatant violation by the Russian Federation of the Budapest Memorandum and its negative impact on the global security architecture. On 27 November 2018, Ukraine once again appealed to the signatory States of the Budapest Memorandum and demanded urgent consultations to ensure full adherence to the commitments and immediate halt of the external aggression against our country. Unfortunately, the Russian Federation once again just ignored this appeal from Ukraine.

We are convinced that the situation with the Budapest Memorandum has to be duly reflected in the context of preparation for the 2020 NPT Review Conference. Effective steps are required to restore confidence in the Memorandum, which would facilitate efforts by the worldwide community to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime.

Furthermore, let me reiterate our deep concern with regard to the systematic violations by the Russian Federation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which pose a direct threat to international security. It is especially disturbing that the Russian Iskander-M operational and tactical missile system, with combat capabilities expanded in breach of the Treaty, was spotted during military exercises in the occupied territory of Ukraine – in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

We also cannot but mention the situation related to the implementation by the Russian Federation of the provisions of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Russia continues supplying illegal armed groups in the south-east of my country with weaponry prohibited by the Convention. Ukraine has been providing explicit evidence of these violations in recent years during the meetings of States parties to the Convention and experts.

Next in the list is the issue of the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention, which, by the way, was drafted in this chamber. Ukraine continues to be seriously worried about the collections of microorganisms that were located at a number of crucial facilities of Ukraine's biosecurity system currently not under control of the Ukrainian Government because of the Russian aggression: namely, the Ukrainian anti-plague station and diagnostic laboratory in the city of Simferopol, the Crimean Republic, as well as the Donetsk and Luhansk regional sanitary and epidemiological stations.

Their illegal takeover by Russia seriously undermines the regime established by the Biological Weapons Convention. Another instrument that has been violated is the Chemical Weapons Convention, also developed in the Conference.

I would like to reiterate here Ukraine's condemnation, in the strongest possible terms, of the March 2018 attack in Salisbury. We agree with the assessment of the Government of the United Kingdom that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible for this attack and we commend the United Kingdom for its transparency and the progress in the investigation, which we hope will soon lead to the prosecution of the perpetrators of this abhorrent attack.

Ukraine also expresses grave concern that Syria has not engaged substantively with the technical secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to resolve the numerous gaps and discrepancies contained in its Chemical Weapons Convention declarations. Even today, more than five years after Syria's accession to the Convention, the list of outstanding issues, questions and ambiguities remains long.

Today, the Syrian Arab Republic has failed to provide clear evidence that it has irreversibly dismantled its chemical weapons programme and decommissioned its chemical weapons. The Syrian Arab Republic must immediately cease any use of chemical weapons and declare all relevant information concerning its chemical weapons programme and stockpiles to OPCW.

Madam President, distinguished delegates, the picture I have just depicted is quite worrisome. The Conference on Disarmament cannot turn a blind eye to it. Our august body does not exist in a vacuum. It has to maintain a constant connection with reality, even though it is a vexing one.

Looking forward to resuming work on negotiating legally binding disarmament instruments, our Conference, at the same time, has to look back and analyse how its own products and other disarmament agreements are being implemented. The holistic approach in this respect has to be applied. Only this way can we succeed.

Ukraine will continue providing input for genuine endeavours aimed at achieving the goals and objectives of the Conference, which is a vital element of the rules-based international order, and, as a reliable and responsible partner, it is looking forward to working closely with you, Madam President, and all willing member States. I thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Ukraine for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President and Dr. Poblete for her statement. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor this morning? I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation welcomes the delegation of the United States to the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and counts on its constructive engagement with colleagues. It is encouraging that the current presidency has expressed its intention of continuing efforts to establish a programme of work for the Conference that will be acceptable to all delegations. At the same time, we trust that the drafts developed by their predecessors, the delegations of Ukraine and the United Kingdom, will be used by our American colleagues in their work.

We continue to support the dual-track approach proposed by some delegations of simultaneous work in two complementary and interrelated areas, on a draft programme of work and on a draft decision of the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish the subsidiary bodies of the Conference. However, we have serious doubts that our joint efforts will lead to a mutually acceptable outcome.

The intervention of the Assistant Secretary of State of the United States stood in sharp contrast to the constructive attitude announced at the start of the session by the head of the United States delegation, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Wood. Yet again we have heard an outpouring of unsubstantiated fabrications about Russian policy on a broad range of issues in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. I will not enter into details at this time with an in-depth analysis of Ms. Poblete's lengthy intervention.

Russian thinking in this area will be explained in the intervention by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, in tomorrow's session of the Conference. After that, during the thematic discussions, we are prepared to provide

arguments that will clearly demonstrate the lack of foundation and fabricated nature of the claims made in this intervention by a high-level American official.

For now, I will not take up your attention, but when we move onto the discussion of specific issues on the agenda of the Conference, we will set out our position in detail.

The President: I thank the delegate from the Russian Federation for his comments and give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al Ashkar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Good morning, distinguished ambassadors and colleagues. What we have witnessed in this room this morning has been totally at odds with the requirements of responsibility and professionalism that every presidency is required to display. We have seen a blatant example of politicization and exploitation of the presidency of the Conference to promote a specific national agenda by means of a statement that cast indictments at random and used United States propaganda to demonize governments that the United States dislikes and whose independent policies are in conflict with its hegemonic inclinations. The United States uses the disarmament platform to promote its policy and to spread its venom and lies about the use of chemical weapons and fulfilment of treaty obligations under conventions relating to disarmament and arms control.

The beating of drums about the use of chemical weapons has become quite deafening. The United States is determined to introduce the issue forcibly and continuously into the work of the Conference, converting the Conference into a platform for targeting States by raising issues that fall outside its mandate instead of focusing on action to promote progress in its work. We vigorously oppose this exploitation of the presidency to promote inter-State interventionist policies.

The United States assumes the role of a judge who is entitled to issue certificates of good conduct to others, and the role of a police officer who insists on acting unilaterally and implementing selective provisions. Everyone in this room knows that the United States, which assumes the right to deliver lessons to others on States' compliance with their treaty obligations, breached its commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons, including its obligations under article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, when it reintroduced nuclear tenets into its latest National Security Strategy. Everyone knows that the United States prevented the adoption of the Final Document at the last Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference by persistently evading the implementation of its legal commitments concerning the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Furthermore, everyone knows that it continues to invoke illusory pretexts in order to avoid complying with its commitment to eliminate its chemical arsenals.

As for the American allegations concerning the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the United States is aware of its vast historical experience of using such weapons during the wars it waged in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is more familiar than others with the military circumstances that can prompt States who possess them to use such weapons. The United States therefore knows full well that its allegations against the Syrian Government are fabricated, have no logical basis and are refuted by the fact that Syria has no chemical weapons. We reserve the right to respond in detail to the false charges levelled against my country by the Assistant Secretary of State, who exploited the presidency to promote her Government's policies based on lies and violations of international law. We shall deliver a further statement in response to the allegations concerning Syria made during her statement.

The President: Thank you. I look forward to your responding statement in the coming days. I now turn the floor over to the gentleman to my left.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The gentleman seated to your left is called Jorge Valero and has been appointed by the democratic, constitutional Government of Nicolás Maduro Moros as Permanent Representative of Venezuela to all accredited international organizations in Geneva, including the Conference on Disarmament. The person on your left is the legitimate representative of a Government elected by direct, universal suffrage and secret ballot.

It is deplorable that Ms. Yleem Poblete should have come here today to launch a barrage of irrational, aggressive, malicious and underhand attacks on several countries,

including Venezuela. Ms. Poblete came to declare war on several countries. She came to say that the United States is a nuclear Power that does not accept that the world should move towards multipolarity, in a climate of peace. She came to say that each and every continent of the world belongs to the United States and to the Government of Donald Trump, and that they will not permit – she stated so quite clearly – other countries to nurture constructive and peaceful relationships with their neighbours on their own continents. She came to say that her Government would attempt to prevent the constitutional, democratic Government of Nicolás Maduro Moros, directly elected, as I said, by the vote of the people in a secret ballot, from taking up the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in May this year.

How will they have Venezuela and its Government expelled from this forum? How will they ensure that Venezuela is disavowed by the international community when the democratic Government of Nicolás Maduro Moros is accepted and recognized by a decisive majority of the world's countries and senior figures in the United Nations, including the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Guterres?

She also came to say that the Government of Donald Trump will attempt to impose a representative of the self-proclaimed interim Government as representative to the Conference on Disarmament: absolutely absurd; absolutely irrational; absolutely undemocratic; absolutely unlawful; absolutely contrary to international law; it is absurd that anyone in this forum should seek the recognition of a puppet so-called president, self-proclaimed on the streets of Caracas, and the repudiation of Nicolás Maduro Moros, directly elected, as I said, by popular vote, in a secret ballot, by more than 6 million Venezuelans.

Fortunately, a decisive majority of the world's countries recognize the democratic, constitutional Government of Nicolás Maduro Moros. Fortunately, as I said, all senior officials of the United Nations, including the Secretary-General, António Guterres, recognize the Bolivarian Government.

Esteemed diplomats of the world here present, we are convinced that multilateralism is the best means of advancing the work of this Conference, together with the standards and agreements adopted multilaterally, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, which should be scrupulously observed. We therefore deplore the fact that this forum should be used, as it has been today, to trample once again upon the noble aims of the United Nations. Our delegation, like the majority of those here, attends this Conference in a spirit of respect and cooperation. We therefore find it unacceptable that anyone should raise issues that are not on the agenda and that therefore have a destabilizing and disruptive impact.

The delegation of the United States, in its capacity as President of the Conference, invited Ms. Poblete here, and Ms. Poblete, clearly as an act of desperation, as we have heard, brought up certain internal Venezuelan affairs, with, in our view, two reprehensible purposes: first, to prolong the stalemate in the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament, and it is clear that attempting to sideline the diplomatic representation of a country in any United Nations forum is a flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of that body; and second, to continue to promote, in all multilateral forums, a clearly failed coup d'état against the democratic, constitutional Government and its President, Nicolás Maduro Moros. As the international community is aware, the supremacist, warmongering, xenophobic and racist Government of Donald Trump has threatened the Bolivarian homeland with external military intervention. This threat, fortunately, has been repudiated by the majority of the countries members of the United Nations.

Ms. Poblete's illegal, undiplomatic behaviour is calculated not only to discredit our country but to offend the majority of the delegations here, who genuinely and in all good faith wish to overcome the deadlock in the Conference. I repeat, the Government of the United States is clearly bent on sabotaging the work of this forum. My friends – and here I call on the world community – Donald Trump's Government must return the \$35 billion that my country has forfeited as a result of the unilateral criminal coercive measures imposed on the people of Venezuela by the Trump Government.

It is, I repeat, unheard of that the Government of Donald Trump should seek to impose a puppet who proclaimed himself so-called president in the streets of Caracas. Esteemed friends, diplomats of the world, who love peace, who seek human brotherhood and reject war, in Venezuela today violent terrorism is being used in an attempt to overthrow the democratic, constitutional Government of President Nicolás Maduro Moros by force. State terrorism is being fomented in Venezuela, support is being given to people who have burned others alive and destroyed public and private property: the latest act of State terrorism was to sabotage the Venezuelan electricity grid, causing a nationwide blackout lasting several days. This terrorism is supported and encouraged by the Government of the United States, which seeks to destroy the national State, with malicious intent to acquire the vast natural wealth of our country. The electrical sabotage, carried out using cutting-edge technology – i.e., a cyberattack – was directed from the United States, specifically Houston and Chicago, and was ordered by Southern Command.

We deplore the abusive, undiplomatic, irresponsible and disrespectful behaviour of the United States in this Conference. We call upon the delegations here present to repudiate this war being waged on Venezuela by the Government of the United States and instead to support the calls for political dialogue in Venezuela, so that it is Venezuelans themselves who overcome their challenges, on the basis of our Constitution. Let us reject threats of war against other countries and advocate for peace and universal brotherhood.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Madam President. Since the representative from the United States State Department mentioned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, I feel obliged to respond, as the statement is completely unacceptable.

First, my delegation strongly rejects the accusations made by the United States representative regarding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's position is clear and remains unchanged. Since there is a lack of trust between the two countries, it is our consistent position that we address issues one by one, in order of feasibility and in phases, as the process of trust-building progresses, and this is exactly what we proposed in Hanoi.

At the second summit meeting between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States in Hanoi, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea expressed its determination to define a necessary path to resolving the issues that serves the best interests of both parties and, on that basis, to take more serious and faithful measures. However, the United States is preoccupied with its own political interests and was not there with sincerity. Our observation is that the United States is not interested in implementing the provisions of the Singapore joint statement. Its only interest is to make use of the negotiations and the outcome of the negotiations to maximize political gain.

The United States showed up at the meeting with a calculation based on its political objective and without any willingness to implement the joint statement. We asked the United States to provide partial sanctions relief – namely, with regard to the five Security Council resolutions adopted since 2016 under the pretext of nuclear testing and the test firing of intercontinental rockets and the particular clauses in the five resolutions affecting civilians, the economy and people's livelihoods.

We see no justification in maintaining these clauses of the sanctions, given the fact that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has halted nuclear tests and rocket test firing for the last 15 months, as President Trump himself has repeatedly asserted. If you look at the paragraphs of these resolutions related to nuclear testing and the test firing of ballistic rockets, there is a clear provision that says that the Security Council "is prepared to strengthen, modify, suspend or lift the measures". I repeat, "suspend or lift the measures as may be needed in light of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's compliance".

The United States publicly recognized that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had discontinued nuclear tests and rocket launches for the past 15 months. However, it has done nothing to remove its sanctions as a corresponding measure; instead, the United

States came up with a preposterous argument that lifting sanctions prior to denuclearization is impossible. We found that calculation by the United States quite odd. Such a gangster-like position will doubtlessly lead to a situation of danger.

Everyone in this room knows what the United States promised at the first summit meeting in Singapore. The United States should keep the promise it made before the eyes of the world and fulfil its obligations.

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

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, we should like to exercise our right of reply in response, so far as Cuba is concerned, to one of the many spurious allegations made by the United States representative to this meeting. Allow me to quote directly from the statement issued by the Revolutionary Government of Cuba on 11 March 2019, condemning the terrorist sabotage of the electricity grid of Venezuela as part of the unconventional war being waged against our sister Latin American country, the Bolivarian homeland. I quote:

As is a matter of public record, and as honourable, informed persons are aware, bilateral relations between Cuba and Venezuela are based on mutual respect, on genuine solidarity, and on a shared commitment to the vision of Bolívar and Martí, Castro and Chaves, a vision of our America, an independent and sovereign America, united in its desire to engage in complementary cooperation with other peoples of the South, and in efforts to implement and uphold the proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace.

The projects under the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement signed between the two countries involve just over 20,000 Cubans, most of them women and 96 per cent of whom are dedicated to the provision of health services to the population at large, while others work in sectors such as education, culture, sports and agricultural food production. The cumulative impact of this cooperation in Venezuela, to give just a few figures, has helped save more than 1,473,000 lives, conduct more than 717 million medical examinations, provide ophthalmological treatment to more than 62 million people and to administer nearly 13 million measles and tuberculosis vaccinations, to which may be added teaching more than 3 million people to read and write.

It is completely untrue that Cuba takes part in operations of the Bolivarian armed forces or of the security services. This is deliberate slander propagated by the Government of the United States. When Bolton and other politicians and United States government officials make such statements, they are deliberately lying for confrontational political ends, for they are in possession of all the necessary data and information and they know what is true. Cuba does not intervene in the internal affairs of Venezuela, any more than Venezuela intervenes in the affairs of Cuba, unlike the United States, which has some 80 military bases in Latin America and the Caribbean, including the one it has hijacked on Cuban territory in Guantánamo, and another 800 or so around the planet, with more than 250,000 soldiers. Cuba has no military bases in any country, and no experts specializing in torture or police crackdowns, no secret prisons, no naval or air forces stalking the coastlines or airspace of sovereign States, and no satellites keeping watch on other nations.

It was by lies that imperialism fomented Augusto Pinochet's bloody coup d'état in Chile, and many other coups by repressive dictatorships in the region, which I shall not list or we shall be here all morning. It was by lies that more than 100,000 defenceless citizens were murdered in the military invasion of Panama in December 1989. It was lies that triggered the military aggression and destabilization of Libya. And it was by lies that the United States and other Powers propped up until the very end the shameful apartheid regime in South Africa. The revolutionary Government hereby sounds a warning that this propensity for wanton, unrestrained lying on the part of the United States Government has had dangerous consequences in the past and could again in the present.

End of quote.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba and I now give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. Ji Zhaoyu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Madam President. From the outset I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference. Allow me first of all to express our thanks to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom for the tireless efforts made during his presidency in respect of the Conference's programme of work. I also look forward to the current President making practical, constructive efforts so that the Conference can really make some substantive progress in disarmament negotiations.

What should the Conference be doing, and what should everyone be discussing here? I think it is very clear to all of us. I think we all must be sufficiently wise and clear-headed to do the work that we must do. The United States Assistant Secretary of State, Ms. Poblete, just now made a number of unwarranted criticisms of China, and I would like to briefly reply.

China has consistently followed a path of peaceful development and has unswervingly pursued a defensive national defence policy, as traditionally reflected in its foreign policy and historically determined by its culture, as its development path and the fundamental roles that it has played. This has been a strategic choice made by the Chinese Government and its people, in keeping with the development trends of the times, and also in line with our own fundamental interests. China has always advocated the prompt and comprehensive prohibition and the complete destruction of nuclear weapons. It has always adhered to a defensive nuclear strategy and has adopted a highly stable nuclear policy, scrupulously abiding by its commitments not to be the first to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons, not to use them against non-nuclear-weapon States and not to use them in nuclear-free zones. It has always maintained its nuclear forces at the lowest level required for its national security. No one should misread or misinterpret the country's strategic intentions.

The United States, on the other hand, possesses the largest and most advanced nuclear arsenal, but still refers to all kinds of groundless pretexts to build up its nuclear forces and strengthen its nuclear deterrence policy, to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, constantly increasing the risk of a nuclear arms race, adhering to a cold war mentality and confrontation, pursuing military hegemony and seeking to ensure its own absolute security, proposing even to make outer space into a military frontier, and brazenly calling for control over outer space. These kinds of actions and deeds are a threat to global strategic stability and world peace and security.

In recent years, China has increased its investment in national defence to an appropriate degree, on the basis of its continuous economic growth, in an entirely legitimate and reasonable manner, without targeting or threatening any country. We hope the countries concerned can view the building of our country's defence rationally and with objectivity. China supports a common, comprehensive, constructive and sustainable security outlook. The Chinese delegation is committed to working with the representatives of all countries to continuously strengthen mutual trust and cooperation in the field of security, to constantly push forward the Conference to make new progress and to jointly make new contributions to the maintenance of world peace and security.

The President: I thank the representative of China and now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Ali Abadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you. Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues, I appreciate this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament today. Today, on the basis of alphabetical order, is the beginning of a new presidency.

We respect the rules of procedure as we respect this august body as the single multilateral forum for nuclear disarmament negotiation. We need to preserve the integrity of this body at a time when nuclear disarmament is more urgent than ever. We have not forgotten the treatment given to us in 2013 during our presidency. Nevertheless, we respect the rules and try to focus on the pressing substantive priorities in this chamber.

I had prepared some elements quite relevant to the work of this body, but today the United States representatives opted to begin the presidency of the United States by discrediting themselves with their arrogant and deep disrespect for professional etiquette long established in forums such as the Conference. They dived into an ocean of irrelevance and were absolutely absurd. There were no limits to their disparaging, pathological narcissism, and their pathetic addiction to unilateralism and disrespect for anything redolent of human interaction and civilized multilateralism has caused them to behave like sadistic militants resorting to every petty tool to blame others for their own mistakes: misconduct, misbehaviour and criminal acts of interference and aggression in the four corners of the world.

The statement against my country by the United States presidency was so cheap, unprofessional, false, irrelevant and pathetic that I should not waste this body's time by responding. It only showed how unfit the United States has become to preside over this body. The United States should be held accountable for sabotaging this important body and turning it into a chamber to flatter its warmongering process in Washington. It is a shame that the United States representative has taken such a long flight from Washington to Geneva just to further contaminate our collective work in the Conference by pushing it further into polarizing and divisive debates.

Distinguished colleagues, we should all be truly worried about the United States representatives' misbehaviour. We are all warned that they may turn violent, since they lack the human impulse to talk and listen in the normal manner we are used to.

I will use my time to go through the substantive issues in the course of discussion over the next two weeks. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor? I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Thank you, Madam President. I will be brief; this body needs to deal in facts. I have heard references today to poison and lies as regards the use of chemical weapons. An independent body, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, found that the Syrian Arab Republic had used chemical weapons on two occasions. Unfortunately, that body was unable to continue its work, but we all know that chemical weapons have been used on several occasions.

The international community must hold perpetrators responsible for the use of chemical weapons. Thank you.

The President: I thank you for your statement. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor? If that is not the case, I will now take the floor in my personal capacity before we end for the day.

Forgive me, but there were a lot of exciting adjectives used to describe United States behaviour today, so I am probably not going to be able to respond to all of them as clearly and passionately as I would like to. I have never heard that much come at me at one time before. It was overkill, so I am going to take things slowly and one by one.

I will start off with Syria and, in general, our approach to the Conference on Disarmament and our presidency. Rest assured that the United States will act impartially. We take our role here very seriously. That said, that does not mean that we will not defend our interests and our positions or respond accordingly when attacked.

It is our job and our goal over the next four weeks to promote a robust conversation that, unfortunately, we were not able to have through another discussion format, such as subsidiary bodies. We will conduct discussions on a programme of work, but we will not be taking forward the decision that was unfortunately unable to garner consensus over the last four weeks under the British presidency.

It is our role as the United States Government, in any capacity, acting in this forum or any other international organization, for that matter, to drive an informed conversation on issues specific to international security that fundamentally drive all our national security

and disarmament policies. If you assess this as politicization of the Conference, then you are correct.

It is my belief that the very fundamental nature of the work that we do here as diplomats is political in nature. Every job I have ever held in the Foreign Service, no matter where it has been, is a political job; that is what we do. I am sorry, then, if that term offends individuals who think that having a broader conversation here in the Conference, a conversation on matters other than a legally binding instrument, is somehow a politicization of the Conference. It is not – it is doing the very thing that we have talked about, which is studying, opening up the conversation to talk about creating an environment conducive to nuclear disarmament, something that you have heard both the Ambassador and Assistant Secretary Poblete discuss and that will be discussed next week by Assistant Secretary Ford.

Today's speech by Assistant Secretary Poblete highlighted in very clear terms the very real and specific security challenges that make this initiative so relevant today, now more than ever. While some of you may have taken offence at some of the examples used in that speech, it was incredibly illustrative of the challenges that we face and the reason why we have become so deadlocked in the Conference and are unable to have a conversation on legally binding instruments – for example, on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

We have to be willing to have frank and honest exchanges on these and other security challenges if we are serious about making progress on nuclear disarmament. I understand that that conversation is threatening to some.

To the individuals sitting to my left, my Government has been very clear: we support democracy in Venezuela, and the interim President there is Juan Guaidó, appointed by the National Assembly according to the Constitution and recognized by 54 other countries, many of them represented here in this room. We do not recognize the representatives sitting to my left, who are not the representatives of the legitimate Government of Venezuela. They are holdovers from the former Maduro regime who, we hope, will be expelled prior to Venezuela's assuming the presidency in May.

Indeed, Sir, if you are uncomfortable here in the Conference with the United States as the President, my delegation would not be offended should you decide to boycott our presidency, as we have done on many occasions, most notably last year, when we, too, so passionately expressed our opposition to the delegation holding this chair.

I think that I will leave it at that. Ambassador Wood will be here tomorrow. We will reconvene at 11 a.m., when, as the representative of the Russian Federation noted, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, will be here. However, if there are any other delegations that wish to take the floor before we depart today, I will once again open up the floor before we end our session. I give the floor to South Africa.

Ms. Mxakato-Diseko (South Africa): Thank you, Madam President. Let me welcome you to Geneva and thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom for steering the work of the Conference on Disarmament professionally. I express our commitment to the Conference, which is based on our firm belief in multilateralism.

This being, if am not mistaken, the first institution to be established after the United Nations came into being, the Conference is of immense importance to us, with a mandate that is clearly defined in its founding instrument. It is our fervent hope that the leadership of the United States will seek to preserve the Conference. It is very easy to destroy. Multilateralism might not mean much for the powerful, but for the weak, it is needed, and it is important to strive to find ways to move the Conference forward.

Again, it is our hope that issues that belong to other institutions will be left in those institutions, so that we can focus on what we do with the approach that is offered to us by the United States of America. You say, Madam, that you will focus on the programme of work. We are ready and willing to work with you on that, and that is within the mandate of the Conference. You will be focusing on what has deadlocked us for 22 years and guide us and offer us leadership in terms of how we move forward.

As I said, it is very easy to destroy, very easy, and very difficult to build. The multilateral framework was put together painstakingly after the Second World War. We may not like it, but somehow we have to make it work.

We will respond to your intentions on Venezuela when we come specifically to that point, on the understanding that South Africa believes in the rule of law and respects the mechanisms of individual States. It does not pronounce on the integrity, beyond the continent, of structures or elections, as it did not venture to pronounce on or get into the debates about the elections that brought your President to power. We do not engage in those discussions, except within the context of our continent. It is our hope that we do not set a precedent where we begin to engage on the legitimacy of this or that, on whether elections held in Europe or Asia were okay or not okay. Those debates should be kept in the domain of other mechanisms that a particular State can use to advance its legitimate interests while, as it were, quarantining the integrity of this body.

We look forward to working with the United States of America to ensure that at the end of the day we have a report for the First Committee this year and that we avoid finding ourselves in a situation where we might not be able to report because we departed from the practice of working. With that, I thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador for her remarks. This concludes our business for today. We will resume tomorrow morning at 11 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.