

Conference on Disarmament

English

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


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President: Mr. Robert A. Wood(United States of America)

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The President: I call to order the 1498th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, His Excellency Mr. Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, will address the Conference this morning. Allow me at this stage to suspend the meeting to welcome Mr. Lavrov.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr. Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Thank you, Excellency, for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, a year has gone by since the last time I spoke here. By historical standards that is no time at all. The events of the past year, however, have brought us to the threshold of a new era in arms control.

A year ago, we had not lost hope that constructive dialogue would enable us to overcome our differences of opinion, find compromise solutions and give a new impetus to joint efforts to strengthen peace and support global stability.

Today, however, we are facing an aggressive egocentricity in foreign policy, fuelled by pretensions to a unilateral right to determine the rules of the international order and the fate of peoples, countries and entire regions. There are growing attempts to demolish fundamental arrangements and remake the entire multilateral architecture of arms control in the opportunistic interests of one party. In this quest for domination, systems that have been working for decades to support stability and predictability in international relations are being summarily demolished.

The most recent example is the deliberate dismantling by the United States of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and its categorical refusal to work together professionally to unpick the genuine problems that had accumulated in this context, as proposed by us on multiple occasions. Washington has not concealed its reasons for withdrawing from the INF Treaty, namely its intention to untie its hands for an unlimited increase in missile capabilities in those regions where it is planned to force through American interests.

The main danger is not even that we are stepping back 30 years in the field of missile and nuclear disarmament. The withdrawal of the United States, first from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and now from the INF Treaty, could lead to a large-scale arms race with unpredictable consequences. Moreover, this time, unlike the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, when the key issue was the strategic arsenals of two countries, this new race will incite many States to consider having their own nuclear and missile capabilities as the only true guarantee of national security. At current levels of technological and industrial development, dozens of countries can now achieve this.

The behaviour of almost all Western States in this situation is especially troubling, with the indifferent and irresponsible attitudes that they have shown to the fate of the INF Treaty, including by coordinated voting in the United Nations against the Russian resolution in defence of the Treaty. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members openly supported the collapse of the INF Treaty, giving the United States the green light to achieve its nuclear missile ambitions. The invented and entirely baseless claims of the United States about the supposed non-compliance with the Treaty of the Russian missile 9M729 were accepted without a murmur although, after we demonstrated the system, independent experts began remarking that the version put forward by the American administration did not hold water. It is telling that the United States not only boycotted the demonstration that we organized of the 9M729 missile but also forced most of its NATO allies to stay away from the event. This approach demonstrated that Washington is not ready for an honest conversation, yet again proving that it has no arguments to justify its baseless position.

The decision already announced by Russia, that it will not deploy intermediate and shorter-range surface-to-surface missiles in regions where equivalent American-made systems are not installed, is also being wilfully ignored. As President Putin has said, we will act symmetrically and only in response to actions by the United States. Furthermore, our response will be designed so as not to allow Russia to be drawn into a costly arms race.

The position of the European countries is disappointing. In the context of the INF Treaty, they have basically abdicated their independent role in ensuring security for themselves and for Europe as a whole.

We would not like to see the sad fate of the INF Treaty spread to the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, whose 10-year validity period will expire on 5 February 2021. As you know, Russia favours extending it for another five years. That would make it possible to avert a further degradation of the strategic stability situation and would also gain some time to consider possible approaches to the new weapons currently appearing in the world and ways of extending control methods to them, given that not all such weapons are covered by the existing Treaty. Despite what you have been told recently in this chamber, Russia is willing to have that conversation.

But first of all, we will need to deal with the unilateral removal from accountability by the United States of the strategic offensive arms that it claims to have converted, which we cannot yet confirm, as is required by the Treaty. This serious issue can be resolved using the procedures provided for in the Treaty. We have discussed appropriate solutions with our American colleagues. The question is whether Washington has the political will.

Russia has been and remains a responsible party to the agreements in force. Fulfilling all of our obligations, we share with other States the responsibility for maintaining peace and reinforcing global security. And that is by no means the full extent of our efforts. Russia is the sponsor and leader of a whole host of major new initiatives. Unfortunately, our Western colleagues are not putting forward any significant initiatives of their own and either ignore or deliberately try to discredit ours.

I wish to stress that we are not imposing anything on anyone. We are persuaded, however, that our proposals could serve as the basis for real negotiations. On numerous occasions we have called on all interested States who are not indifferent to the future of humanity to look together for common ground and work out compromises.

As President Putin underscored, all our proposals are very well known to our Western partners. They remain on the table, and when the West is mature enough for it, we will be ready for responsible professional work. For the meantime, instead of a constructive reaction we are hearing discussions of restarting nuclear testing, placing strike weapon systems in space and even the possibility of initiating a "limited nuclear war". For Russia and, I hope, for the majority of States represented here, that prospect is unacceptable. It may become a reality, however, if between us we cannot find a sensible alternative to the destabilization of the international order, the further intensification of conflicts between States and the undermining of the system of multilateral agreements on arms control.

Responsible and sustained collective efforts are required to ensure international security and stability. Progress towards the reduction of nuclear weapons on a bilateral Russian-American basis, as shown by the crisis around the INF Treaty, has ground to a halt. The time has come for serious thought about how to make the process of nuclear arms control multilateral and acceptable to all the relevant States. In our view, any multilateral process must be based on the principle of a common and indivisible security. It would be pointless to consider nuclear disarmament in isolation from the full range of factors with a negative impact on strategic stability.

We consider it extremely important to take all necessary measures to support the viability and effective functioning of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Unfortunately, even here the difficulties are increasing. Conflicts are building up between nuclear and non-nuclear States. The decision of the United States not to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and to begin preparing its national test site for the resumption of such tests is disruptive. The situation as regards implementation of the 1995

resolution on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East remains unclear. Russia, as one of the three co-sponsors of the resolution and mindful of its responsibility for the fate of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, supported the decision of the United Nations General Assembly to convene a conference on a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in November of this year and intends to facilitate its success, taking into account the interests of all countries in the region.

A few words on the disarmament mechanism of the United Nations and its three pillars. It is clear that it would not be feasible to completely eliminate politics from the work of the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee of the General Assembly and the United Nations Disarmament Commission. In recent times, however, individual countries have been making persistent attempts to raise topics on these forums that are conducive to the settling of scores with States that they find undesirable. Of all the factors obstructing the work of the United Nations disarmament triad, excessive politicization is steadily moving to the fore. We find it inadmissible for sensible and promising proposals intended to ensure equal and indivisible security for all through a substantive, constructive and professional dialogue to be simply brushed aside in this way.

The outcome is that the work of the Conference on Disarmament is blocked, the decisions of the First Committee are devalued and the authority of the United Nations Disarmament Commission is diminished. Nonetheless, the current difficulties do not mean that the mechanism established by our predecessors in 1978 is defective in and of itself and so must be dismantled, as certain radically inclined States are suggesting. Russia does not agree with that.

The state of the United Nations disarmament mechanism is a reflection of the general difficulties of the international order and the refusal of the West as a whole to improve the existing arms control instruments and develop new universally acceptable instruments. Examples are not hard to find. Just look at the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, which was drafted here at the Conference. Instead of an effective verification mechanism for compliance with the Convention, whose establishment is being blocked by Washington, the Western countries are now proposing “visits on invitation”. That is how they propose to “confirm” the compliance of the work of biological infrastructure facilities and the research that they undertake with the provisions of the Convention.

Another example is the refusal to negotiate on preventing the placement of weapons in space. There is a Russian-Chinese draft for a relevant treaty. There are no other instruments with that aim on the negotiating table. As in the past, however, the States parties to the Conference are not able to agree even on the start of negotiations. For more than ten years now we have been hearing nothing but excuses: that drafting a treaty is a lengthy process, that beginning negotiations before there is a real threat of weapons being deployed in space is premature and that imposing a legally binding ban on such deployment simply makes no sense.

Meanwhile, the United States has already allocated funding to establish space-based missile defence and the placement of strike systems in near-Earth orbit. Clearly, this component of a ballistic missile defence system will have the capability to hit space objects, among others. Thus, an operational military structure will be built, ready at any time to “cleanse” space of the orbital property of countries that Washington finds undesirable. This opens up a Pandora’s box, since many States have active space programmes, including a good few that are either already developing weapons payloads to be deployed in space or have the capability to do so.

That shows that the problem is becoming ever more pressing. We consider that the work of the Conference in this area can be given additional momentum by the Group of Governmental Experts on further effective measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space, set up pursuant to a General Assembly resolution, which is just now holding its final session.

I would once again draw your attention to the Russian initiative to draft an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism, which I presented here in March 2016. One of the key provisions of the draft convention is to ensure that the use of chemical substances and biological agents for terrorist purposes is made a criminal offence. The issue could not be more timely. In Syria alone, according to

various estimates, between 300 and 400 acts of terrorism using chemical substances have been committed.

We consider the reluctance shown towards our initiative for an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism and the desire to ignore a multitude of chemical terrorism incidents in Syria as two sides of the same coin. Despite their own statements of concern for the growing threat of terrorism with weapons of mass destruction, our opponents speak out against strengthening the international legal basis for combating this scourge.

Instead of cooperation, the West has thrown its weight behind the establishment of a so-called attributive mechanism of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), counting on the fact that, with the manipulation of the OPCW technical secretariat, this mechanism will be used as a means of exerting political pressure on undesirable States. This crude incursion into the prerogatives of the United Nations Security Council has already led to deep divisions within OPCW and certainly casts doubt on the prospects for the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Colleagues, I cannot fail to speak out against those who, building on their theories about the long-standing stalemate at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, are practically arguing for its dissolution. When individual countries and groups of countries refuse a substantive discussion on important issues, including those affecting their own security, stirring up propaganda around them, it is doubly important to safeguard the Conference as the only negotiating platform for a broad range of the most urgent problems of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. No other format exists which actually offers the prospect of real multilateral negotiation work. It is unlikely that one could be established on a truly inclusive basis in the current climate.

We consider the discussions that took place last year in the subsidiary bodies of the Conference on Disarmament to have been very useful. We were prepared to support the consensus around the British draft decision to continue the work of the subsidiary bodies on all agenda items. We regret that the draft did not receive the necessary support and are especially disappointed by the refusal of the United States delegation to discuss the substance of the proposal.

Nonetheless, I am sure that all of us will find sufficient wisdom and strength to overcome the crisis, to preserve and strengthen the contemporary system of international agreements on arms control and to supplement it with new arrangements. Unfortunately, the statement delivered yesterday in your forum by the representative of the United States demonstrated precisely the opposite. I nonetheless hope that our Western colleagues will be able to take a clear-headed look at the situation, set their priorities in a responsible manner and return to collective efforts with us to ensure peace and security, including arms control.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you every success in your work.

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

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The first thing that responsible States expect when a State assumes the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament is that the State will be guided by the rules of neutrality and impartiality and abide by the rules of procedure of the Conference in performing its duties. But the United States forgot those principles and began its presidency of the Conference yesterday morning with a speech that can only be described as a display of arrogance and vanity. It shamefully exploited the presidential platform to cast indictments at random against member States, and to impose its policies based on double standards and its desire to control other States, using terms that are incompatible with the diplomatic language and rules of conduct of this august forum. This is unprecedented and unacceptable behaviour on the part of a State that is assuming responsibility for the presidency. Of course, we were not surprised by such conduct from a State that has given priority, both last year and since the beginning of this

year's session, to attempts to undermine the presidency of the Conference and disrupt its work. It has used the Conference as a platform to serve its narrow political objective, thereby impeding the adoption of the Conference's substantive annual report to the General Assembly.

Success in addressing the challenge of restoring the status of the Conference as a multilateral body tasked with negotiating disarmament agreements is a collective responsibility of all members of the Conference, and requires them to cooperate in a genuine and non-discriminatory manner and to mobilize sufficient political will to achieve that goal. It cannot be achieved, however, in the face of continuing obstructive attempts of the kind that we witnessed in this chamber yesterday, when the representative of the State occupying the podium of the presidency violated rule 3 of the rules of procedure of the Conference, which reaffirms the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. She divided member States into groups depending on their degree of submission to American decisions, and attacked States that refuse to pursue American political goals and objectives. In her address, she unilaterally assigned responsibilities to the Conference on Disarmament that exceed its role and mandate and entrusted it with powers belonging to the Security Council.

We advise the representative of the American Administration and here I have used a milder term than that of regime because I respect the rules governing discourse in this chamber – who requested the members of the Conference to refrain from politicization and show professionalism, to look in the mirror and to pay attention to her country's obligation to destroy its arsenal of chemical weapons before pressing charges and delivering lessons to others in this regard.

We shall not waste this Conference's time with an absurd discussion in response to the beating of drums about the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the allegations concerning our obligations under the Convention and attempts to cast doubt on the Syrian declaration. We are addressing these issues at OPCW in The Hague, which is where they should be discussed. Syria responded to the charges and allegations made by the United States at the ninetieth session of the Executive Council of the Organization.

Action to promote the non-proliferation regime must include measures to guarantee the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Israel, which is the closest ally of the United States and the sole threat to peace, security and stability in the Middle East, must be asked to accede to the Convention and compelled to abandon the chemical weapons in its possession. If the American Administration is serious about discussing the risks posed by the use of chemical weapons in this negotiating forum, it should review its obstructive position with respect to the launching of negotiations on the draft Convention proposed by the Russian Federation, which was referred to today by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and which seeks to counter the risks of chemical terrorism, which pose a serious threat to the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention and a genuine challenge to States' security and stability. It should also condemn the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria by terrorist organizations associated with Al-Qaida, the most recent of which was the terrorist attack on residential neighbourhoods in Aleppo, Syria, on 24 November 2018, rather than persisting with its practice of political manipulation in this chamber.

With regard to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United States must protect its own glasshouse before throwing stones at others. Its well-known historical record and its continued obstruction of measures to achieve the Treaty's objectives deny it the moral and political high ground from which to deliver lessons to others. It also fails to comply strictly with the provisions of the Treaty, primarily article VI, since it continues to develop and deploy warheads. The same applies to the provisions of article I of the Treaty, which require it to refrain under all circumstances from assisting, encouraging or inducing Israel to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

It also failed to support the full implementation of the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference and took steps to thwart the 2015 Review Conference and prevent it from adopting its Final Document in order to protect Israel, which is not a party to the Treaty. Needless to say, pressure must be brought to bear

on Israel to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, to place all its facilities under comprehensive safeguards, unconditionally and without further delay, and to eliminate all its nuclear military capacities that are not subject to international oversight, the aim being to strengthen the non-proliferation regime and to achieve the universality of the Treaty, which is a basic prerequisite for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Israel recently acknowledged responsibility for the assault on Syrian territory in 2007, after denying it for an entire decade. It is therefore essential to condemn the assault and compel Israel to cease refusing to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency rather than continuing to raise the issue to no avail.

Given the duty and ability of the Conference on Disarmament to resume its role as the sole negotiating forum on disarmament and to end the stalemate that it has faced for more than two decades, which has undermined its credibility, it is essential to focus on agenda items rather than perversely delving into issues that fall outside the scope of the Conference's role and mandate, especially when such issues are raised by the State occupying the presidency.

Syria has unfailingly affirmed its commitment to promoting the role of the Conference and respect for its rules of procedure, but it is concerned today about attempts to hijack the presidency and exploit it to achieve goals and implement policies that bear no relationship to the Conference and its mandate. The basic function of the President of the Conference is to work towards the adoption of a programme of work for the Conference in a transparent and impartial manner. As we respect the rules of procedure governing the rotation of the presidency, we shall remain in this chamber and shall not leave it as others have done. We intend to observe the extent to which the presidency adheres to the rules and to ensure that the position is not politicized and exploited for political goals.

The President: My next speaker is the representative of the United Kingdom. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Mr. President, as this is the first time that I have taken the floor under your presidency, allow me first to warmly congratulate you on the assumption of this important office.

I also thank you for the support that you and your delegation gave to me and my delegation during our recent presidency and I can assure you very sincerely of the same from our delegation in your four weeks in the chair.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank all those delegations that gave us their support during our presidency. There was widespread support in the room for what we were trying to do and I am very grateful for all the advice, engagement and feedback that we got on our proposals. I sincerely believe that the conversations that we had over those few weeks and the collective efforts of most delegations in this room allowed us to put forward a proposal which was the best available in the circumstances for getting the Conference on Disarmament back to work this year.

Of course, I am disappointed at a personal level that we did not manage to secure consensus, but, and more important, I am disappointed for the Conference. It was a missed opportunity, as I stated last week, and I believe that the Conference now needs to look at how we are going to take forward work on our substantive agenda.

I note Mr. Lavrov's statement earlier that he was also disappointed that the draft did not command consensus. He said that his delegation was ready to join consensus; that was not the impression which, I believe, many people in this room took from the statement of his representative last Thursday. We all need to reflect on why that was and where we move from here.

Allow me, Mr. President, briefly to respond to a couple of the points that Mr. Lavrov raised in his address. First, the question of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The United Kingdom is clear that the INF Treaty has played an important role in supporting Euro-Atlantic security over the last few decades. We would of course like to see the Treaty continue, but for that to happen there must be full and verified compliance by all parties. We remain committed, as I believe do all NATO allies, to preserving effective arms control agreements. But, as the American Assistant Secretary of

State reminded us yesterday, for arms control to be effective, all signatories must respect their obligations. Russia is violating the Treaty and has been for some time.

We recognize the exhaustive efforts made by the United States over a number of years to press Russia to return to compliance. We, along with our NATO allies, have consistently supported the United States' diplomatic efforts, including, most recently, at the meeting of foreign ministers in December and at the NATO-Russia Council in January. Russia has offered no credible response to our shared concerns, only obfuscation and contradictions designed to mislead. This fits a wider pattern of behaviour from Russia that seriously undermines our collective security.

We support the United States' decision to suspend its participation in the INF Treaty. It is Russia's fault alone that we have arrived at this point. We strongly support the finding of the United States that Russia is in material breach of the Treaty. Russia has developed and deployed Treaty-violating missiles. NATO allies agree that a situation whereby the United States was respecting its treaty obligations, and Russia was not, was not sustainable.

The six-month withdrawal process offers Russia a final opportunity to return to full and verified compliance and to respect its Treaty obligations. Russia's Treaty-violating missile capabilities, alongside its wider disregard for the rules-based international system, have put European security at risk and we are clear where the responsibility for that lies.

Another issue taken up by the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs was the safety and security of outer space. We agree that this is a crucial issue for all our societies. Many aspects of our societies depend on signals or data from or transmitted through outer space. It is in the interests of our citizens' security and prosperity that we discuss these issues. The United Kingdom does not believe, however, that the claimed arms race in outer space is the primary threat to space safety and security. There are other issues, such as the thousands of pieces of space debris spinning through space and threatening our satellites, which are more important.

We are also deeply concerned about the development of advanced anti-satellite missiles and other ground-based weapons by many of the States that speak about an arms race in outer space. We are ready to discuss these threats in the Conference. But the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects that the Minister referenced is incomplete and is flawed as a concept. It focuses on prohibiting the act of placing weapons in space, ignoring other potentially aggressive acts such as ground-based missile development. It lacks any proposal for verification, which must be the basis for any successful arms control treaty, as with the INF Treaty. Without intensive and technical inspection before launch, it is impossible to confirm the purpose or function of a satellite. Such inspection is costly, impractical and unlikely to achieve political consensus from the launching States.

Lastly, the draft Treaty seems to redefine space as a separate domain in terms of international law. The United Kingdom believes, as stated in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, that international law applies to outer space, including international humanitarian law. That said, the United Kingdom is ready and willing to discuss these issues.

A British expert is participating in the Group of Governmental Experts meeting this week and we continue to engage with partner Governments, academia and the private sector to discuss how best to tackle space security issues. We look forward to continuing those discussions in a holistic way.

Finally, Mr. President, the Russian Minister also referenced the proposal of an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism. He accused certain countries of ignoring acts of chemical and biological terrorism in Syria. The United Kingdom's position on this is clear. We do not need a new instrument for this. We need to respect what we already have. The proposal of an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism is not credible coming from Russia, which has used chemical weapons in my country in breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and has covered for its client State's use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The Minister referenced divisions in OPCW. I believe the only division in OPCW is that between those who use chemical weapons, or cover for those who do in breach of their commitments, on the one hand, and those on the other hand who are serious about defending and strengthening the norm against chemical weapons use that has persisted for a century. The international community has united in an unprecedented way to emphasize our determination to uphold the global norm against chemical weapons use.

Over 150 countries came together in June at the special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, resulting in a renewed commitment to uphold this norm against chemical weapons use. It provided a clear mandate for OPCW to identify those responsible for chemical weapons use in Syria and to assist others in attributing responsibility for chemical weapons attacks elsewhere. We look forward to working with all countries that are serious when they say that they want to uphold the norm against chemical weapons use to that end.

The President: I thank the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the gentleman on my far left.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): As the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Syria rightly pointed out, it is deplorable that the representative of the United States Government should use the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament to trample over the most fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and brazenly violate the rules of procedure of this Conference.

We call on you, Mr. President, in the most categorical manner, to respect the mandate of the speaking now speaking to you, the person who, as you know, will be the next president of this forum and who represents the democratic and constitutional Government of President Nicolás Maduro Moros, who was elected by direct universal suffrage and secret ballot by more than 6 million Venezuelan men and women.

You should be aware, Mr. President, that your abusive and anti-diplomatic behaviour is not supported by the majority of the delegations here. How different your disrespectful, anti-diplomatic and irresponsible conduct, Mr. Ambassador of the United States, is from that of Ambassador Aidan Liddle as President of the Conference on Disarmament, whom we once again commend for his invaluable contributions to the search for a consensus and whose professionalism and transparency we acknowledge.

Mr. President, the presence of Minister Sergey Lavrov at this Conference on Disarmament has confirmed the importance that the Russian Federation attaches to this forum. The Bolivarian Government is a keen supporter of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Like the Russian Federation, our country believes that the Conference on Disarmament plays a fundamental role in these matters. We agree on the need to create conditions for maintaining peace so as to preserve the existence of the human species.

We recognize the fundamental contributions made by the Russian Federation in advancing nuclear and chemical disarmament and we value the efforts made by the State to reduce its nuclear arsenal. We believe that the draft treaty drawn up by the Russian Federation and China on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space merits the attention of all countries in the Conference on Disarmament. This initiative could be explored in the near future with a view to overcoming the current impasse in the Conference on Disarmament through a comprehensive and balanced programme of work.

We believe that the nuclear-weapon States should step up their efforts in the various areas of disarmament. We reiterate that multilateralism is the best instrument to advance the work of this Conference. Respect for multilaterally adopted norms and agreements, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, is indispensable for addressing issues related to international security and disarmament.

We share the concerns of Minister Lavrov regarding the fallacious accusations made by the United States Government against the Russian Federation and other sovereign States at this Conference. Yesterday, we witnessed the anti-diplomatic and warmongering behaviour of the United States Government.

Ms. Poblete, the Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance of the United States, gave an aggressive speech to this Conference in which she savagely attacked countries including Russia, China, Cuba, Syria, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Venezuela, my country. She launched ferocious attacks against the Russian Federation with the devious aim of calling into question its scrupulous adherence to international law and, in particular, to the bilateral and multilateral agreements on disarmament. Such behaviour, far from contributing to international peace and security, only increases global tensions. The civilized world is calling for peace, not war.

The United States is the only country that has ever used atomic bombs, and it has the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

Esteemed colleagues, Venezuela advocates the need to overcome the impasse in this Conference and reach a consensus on the programme of work, without reservations. As the next President of the Conference on Disarmament, I will work towards that end.

It is our hope that respectful dialogue will allow this Conference to make solid progress and overcome the challenges that it faces. The fundamental principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations and the agreements reached in the field of disarmament must be respected along that path.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, you heard the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on current issues within the broad question of arms control, but since comments have been made about several aspects of his statement, I consider it necessary to make my own comments.

For that purpose, we need to travel back in time to 2002, when the United States unilaterally – and, I note, without recriminations – withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which for many years had been one of the fundamental elements of strategic parity between the Soviet Union, later Russia, and the United States. Vladimir Putin gave his assessment of the step, saying that he considered the withdrawal from the ABM Treaty to be a mistake. Our position on this has not changed.

Why are we mentioning this? We are mentioning it because, after the withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty, the situation was fundamentally altered. Many of the issues that we are facing today are the consequences of that step.

First, the ABM Treaty not only limited the deployment of ballistic missile defence systems in the Earth's regions, but also included an outright ban on placing anti-ballistic missile components in space. In the absence of such a prohibition, no one can guarantee that this type of weapon will not turn up in space one day. In other words, the question is: so why did the United States withdraw from the ABM Treaty?

Second, withdrawal from the ABM Treaty untied the Washington's hands with regard to deploying ballistic missile defence components beyond the borders of its national territory, including in Europe. And United States ballistic missile defence components, including interceptors, are deployed in Europe. The problem is that Mk-41 universal launchers are equally suitable for launching anti-ballistic missiles and intermediate-range Tomahawk cruise missiles. We have spoken about this on numerous occasions, but we are being stubbornly ignored.

This means that, close to the borders of the Russian Federation, powerful first-strike systems are appearing, among them nuclear systems because Tomahawk cruise missiles can be fitted with nuclear warheads. Now, if you speak to any competent experts in the field, they will tell you that we should base our judgments not on people's intentions and on what they say, but on their military capabilities. If a capability exists, it is a potential threat, which can become a present threat at any time. And Russian military command will have to consider that threat in its planning.

In her statement yesterday, Ms. Poblete expressed the new idea that Russia has been developing missiles supposedly in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty since the mid-2000s. That is something new. Previously our American colleagues were working with two figures, the dates of the launches with the allegedly

prohibited range: 2008–2011. Now new grounds are surreptitiously being manufactured for unsubstantiated claims against Russia. What makes them unsubstantiated? A number of reasons. In order to understand them, you need to be familiar with the chronology of the events.

If we take the mid-2000s as the starting point, for some reason the American concerns were only voiced much later, several years after the mid-2000s. First came the leaks to the media, then public statements, and only after persistent requests from the Russian side did the first talks take place. These, the first full-scale talks between Russia and the United States under the INF Treaty, took place in 2014. At those talks, it was said that the Russian Federation was developing a missile with a prohibited range.

A more detailed chronology is included in the text of the briefing given by deputy minister Sergey Ryabkov in November last year. Judging by the impressive regularity with which colleagues continue to trot out their previous claims, I get the impression they have only the vaguest notion of how events actually unfolded. I strongly advise them to read the briefing text, at least in order to fill in a few gaps in their knowledge of the history of this issue.

As for the missile designation, 9M729, the Americans announced it in December 2017. We immediately announced that we did indeed have such a missile. What have we been hiding? This begs the question which remains unanswered to this day: how did our American colleagues establish for certain from the designation, manufacturer and certain other details, which include the coordinates of the launch but not of the flight, and the dates, that the platform's delivery range exceeded the distance banned under the Treaty? Until now, we have not been provided with any data from an objective inspection that would dispel all these questions, doubts and suspicions.

For its part, the Russian Federation has taken unprecedented unilateral transparency measures. I stress that the transparency was unilateral and so we will not be dictated to in terms of what we should be showing, how and to whom. If the transparency had been mutual, under an agreement with the United States as we proposed, then we would have agreed on a framework for that transparency. We suggested that too. The answer was no. What has Russia done wrong? We demonstrated the missile, our military personnel explained everything, anyone who had questions could ask them. But at the time, they simply concluded that we were in violation and that was that.

Now I am coming to what is probably the key conceptual point regarding life in the modern world. You might have noticed that the statements of our colleagues increasingly include the expression "rules-based international order". Here is how that looks in relation to the INF Treaty: the foreign ministers of the NATO countries had a meeting and instituted a rule that Russia was violating the INF Treaty. That's what the rule is. That is all. If they think so, that means there is a violation. And no one cares how things really are. No one even tries to find out. I will not go into details, I hope that we will return to a more detailed and substantive review of the INF Treaty situation in the thematic discussions.

Let me finish by saying something about the Russian initiative for an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism and the Chemical Weapons Convention. I gave you an example of how certain of our colleagues, including some sitting here in this chamber, or their Governments, are changing the rules-based international order, or rather they are changing the rules and consequently the order. As for OPCW, when these same colleagues of ours like OPCW findings, they accept them and when they do not like them, they simply disregard them. When it suits them, they recall the authority of OPCW and when it does not suit them, they forget it. Take the Salisbury incident. From the very beginning, we proposed using the mechanisms of OPCW to conduct a joint investigation. What response did we get? No. But when Syria had to be bombed, even OPCW was not necessary, video clips on social media were sufficient.

More generally, we are witnesses to serious changes in our world. It seems that some of our colleagues have not learned anything from the very recent past. They prefer to forget. And other colleagues omit to remind them that, at the start of that very same decade, the 2000s, legitimate governmental authority was swept away in a Middle Eastern country on the pretext that it had weapons of mass destruction. I would like to remind my

colleagues of that and ask them to keep it in mind rather than yet again giving their backing to the latest allegations against whomever that might be, unless these are substantiated by incontrovertible evidence.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his comments. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? The representative of Australia has the floor.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Mr. President, our delegation is taking the floor to speak briefly on issues of space and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. In October last year, Australia changed its abstention vote at the General Assembly on the resolution on no first placement of weapons in outer space and decided to vote against the proposal.

We did so because we believe that the dual-use nature of many space objects provides plenty of potential for them to be used as weapons. An orbital space object designed to repair other objects can equally be deployed to damage other objects. This brings us back to our central argument and our main concern with the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects. How do we determine what a weapon is? It is such problems of verification and dual-use capability that make credible arms control in outer space so challenging. Ostensibly, civilian satellites can disguise malign purposes. Australia questions why these initiatives are only concerned with weapons placed in space, when numerous countries have developed and demonstrated terrestrial-based weapons that can destroy or interfere with space objects. For these reasons, an abstinence approach to the placement of weapons in space provides limited comfort and could have counterproductive consequences by allowing unfettered development of terrestrial and dual-use counter-space systems.

Australia believes that what will provide meaningful comfort in this domain is to establish rules and norms around appropriate behaviour. A crucial step towards this goal is to reinforce processes that will enhance trust and transparency sooner rather than later. This is why Australia supports efforts to strengthen transparency and confidence-building measures, which offer a rapid pathway to improving space security.

The 2013 report of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space was agreed upon by consensus and provides a starting point for space safety, security and sustainability that can be used immediately on a voluntary basis. These measures are where our attention and energy should be focused and not on the pursuit of banning ever-evolving, undefined new technology.

Turning now to the INF Treaty, as the Foreign Minister of Australia stated in this chamber just a few weeks ago, Australia is disappointed that Russia has so far not addressed its issues of non-compliance with the Treaty, placing its continued viability in question. We urge Russia to return to compliance in the period of time available. It is in no one's interest to return to an arms race like that witnessed during the cold war.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for her remarks. I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Mushayavanhu (Zimbabwe): Mr. President, since this is the first time that I am making a statement here during your presidency, let me begin by expressing my delegation's warm congratulations to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament during this first part of the 2019 session.

My delegation stands ready to offer all the support and cooperation for the successful discharge of your mandate. My delegation also wishes to welcome the appearance before the Conference of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and, like other high-level representatives who have addressed this Conference during this session, we wish to thank Mr. Lavrov for his input and address to the Conference. We welcome his important call for us to preserve the Conference and to refrain from its over-politicization.

Zimbabwe is committed to its international obligations in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. It is in this regard that my country ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and deposited the instrument of ratification on 13 February 2019.

The President: I thank the representative of Zimbabwe for his remarks. Is there any other representative who would like to take the floor? I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on assuming the office of President of the Conference. Like many of our colleagues and delegations, I too would like to take this opportunity to express the sincere hope that, as President, you will be able, like your predecessors, on the basis of an impartial approach and in strict adherence to the Conference's rules of procedure, to assist the members of the Conference as they continue to work on an arrangement to begin substantive work as quickly as possible.

I am taking the floor primarily to take up the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, submitted jointly by China and the Russian Federation and mentioned by some delegations today. Today, in his statement, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs again expressed the hope that the Conference will quickly initiate substantive negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

In my remarks today I do not intend to raise my country's specific points concerning this draft treaty. I think that we have all come to the understanding that this question should be specifically discussed by the subsidiary body on prevention of an arms race in outer space, to be set up by the Conference as soon as possible.

Regarding the prevention of an arms race in outer space, we look forward to working on this matter in the near future with other delegations, and to conducting serious discussions on the relevant issues, including the draft treaty. So I would like once again to take this opportunity to express the ardent hope that the member States of the Conference, with the assistance of the President, will, on the basis of the draft decision put forward under the presidency of the United Kingdom, quickly turn to substantive work and make arrangements to establish the subsidiary body.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his statement. Are there any other delegations that would like to take the floor? The representative of Cuba, you have the floor.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, very briefly, I would like to thank the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs for taking part in this Conference on Disarmament to offer us at first hand his views on the complex international situation that we are facing.

This constructive attitude and respect for the principles of multilateralism are what is required in this Conference on Disarmament, and we hope that they will serve as an example and inspire all of us here to work constructively during this session.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his statement. Are there any other delegations that would like to take the floor? If that is not the case, I would like to take the floor in a national capacity to respond to some of the comments that have been made this morning.

First, I would like to start with the statement made by the distinguished Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was a shame that the Minister came all this way in essence to give a statement that reiterated some of the same old words that have been used to try to camouflage Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. I expected a much more robust defence. Clearly, he found that difficult to do. He made a number of charges throughout. One, in particular, was about accountability. In essence, he was talking about the United States' accountability under the New START Treaty. We, the United States, have some very serious concerns about things that Russia is doing – the development of some of these new kinds of systems, which were referred to in the 1 March 2018 speech by President Putin – and so, through the Bilateral Consultative Commission,

we tried to resolve some of these implementation issues. We are still waiting for our Russian colleagues to explain to us how they are going to bring those new systems under the New START Treaty in terms of accountability. We will be having those discussions in the coming weeks.

It was interesting that Mr. Lavrov commented on the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament and referred to some countries refusing to discuss issues. My recollection is that Russia, joined by several other States, had no interest in having a discussion in the Conference and was opposed to having even a basic discussion about working methods and enlargement. I am not sure what the distinguished Russian Minister was trying to get at, but maybe at some time clarification can be provided.

A couple of things on the INF Treaty: Russia experienced two very devastating defeats in the fall in New York, when it first tried to move, at a very late hour, a draft text that was not only administratively rejected by the membership review and the First Committee, but then also rejected in the General Assembly. The comments that I am about to make refer to something that was mentioned by the Russian representative just a few moments ago. If you are wondering why, with regard to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and other issues, no one seems to be listening, it is because, other than some of your malign-actor partners, no one believes you. You need to reflect on that. Those defeats in New York, I know, were very devastating for the Russian delegation, but you need to look and see what the reasons were for that.

Just a point on space, because I think that is important. Russia and China have, as we know, been pushing the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects. We have been very clear about why we oppose that – I do not need to go into the details. But we do have, for those of you who have not seen it, a paper put together by the Defense Intelligence Agency on some of the challenges in space. I would recommend that you pick it up. It talks about some of the challenges that we face in space from Russia and China and other entities. I think you would find it a very good read, and it will give you a lot more information about some of the activities in which countries are engaged in space.

I will move to Syria. Very simply, as I have said before, a country that has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people has very little in the way of legitimacy. The Syrian representative referred to his presidency – it was a failure. Its presidency was also a tragedy for this body. Syria is an outlier, and its words have no legitimacy. With regard to the representative of Syria giving advice to the United States, no thank you. You can call charges of chemical weapons use by your regime a broken record, but let me reiterate: we will raise this issue in this forum, and in other forums, and, at some point, Syria will be held to account for the crimes that it has committed against its own people. It was very interesting that he referred to violations by the United States of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I do recall that, a decade ago, Syria was building a plutonium reactor in Dayr al-Zawr. I wonder, was that considered by the regime in Damascus to be a violation of the Treaty? Indeed, it was a violation.

With regard to Venezuela. I think that the Assistant Secretary of State spoke very clearly yesterday, and I would just like to reiterate something that we have already said in this body. The former Maduro regime is illegitimate and my Government does not recognize it. I do not need to take that any further.

There I will stop. Clearly, we will have many more opportunities to discuss some of these issues going forward in the Conference. Now I will resume my role as President. Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor? The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, you have the floor.

Mr. Al Ashkar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): With regard to the Syrian presidency of the Conference, I should first like to recall that it was the only presidency during last year's session that took serious, professional and responsible steps towards preparing a programme of work for the Conference. We are well aware of the grounds for the failure to adopt the programme. Syria is committed, in letter and spirit, to the rules of procedure and has taken vigorous action in that regard. We therefore reject the criticism levelled against its presidency.

Compared with the Syrian presidency, we note that the presidency of the United States began this year with a statement by a high-level official who cast indictments at random, disregarding the requirement to maintain a professional, positive and constructive atmosphere that is conducive to a transparent and constructive dialogue among States and facilitates progress on the agenda items of the Conference. The charges levelled against States were an attempt to demonize them, implying that the United States was an innocent angel, while the States that it criticized were demons.

The allegations of the use of chemical weapons are entirely fallacious. We have refuted these lies in numerous communications and in statements reflected in the records of the Conference on Disarmament, OPCW and the Security Council. I shall not waste my colleagues' time by repeating these observations, which can be consulted in the aforementioned records. I wish to underscore, however, that the allegations serve as a tool to prolong the lives of terrorists in Syria so that they can be exploited politically by the United States and some other countries. They are not, as I said, supported by any evidence for the simple reason that the Syrian army has the upper hand and has managed to liberate most of the territory of Syria.

The use of such weapons was not required, even in the most challenging conditions. In any case, the army does not possess them, as confirmed by the Fact-Finding Mission and the Joint Mission on the elimination of chemical weapons in its report to the Security Council in 2014. We call upon the United States, which has a lengthy record of marketing fabricated data concerning weapons of mass destruction as a pretext for launching military attacks in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, to halt its disinformation campaign aimed at distorting the image of the Syrian Government and its practice of cheap political blackmail.

In February 2003 we heard the Secretary of State of the United States deliver fabricated allegations in the Security Council concerning the existence of evidence, facts and conclusions based on what was termed reliable intelligence to justify his country's assault on a State in our region on the pretext that it possessed weapons of mass destruction. One may ask whether this has been forgotten, as if it were an ephemeral event that could be ignored, notwithstanding all the disasters caused by the killing and displacement of millions of people and the destabilization of the region, whose people are still paying the price.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, you are witnesses to the Russian-American dialogue for one simple reason: the Conference on Disarmament remains one of the few platforms where we and our American colleagues have this challenging dialogue, even if it is through a microphone. For that reason, the value of the Conference as a platform, including for Russian-American dialogue, is indispensable.

As for the paper with the findings of the intelligence services, that brings us back yet again to the start of the 2000s, a significant period. At that time, the intelligence services of one country came to the conclusion that another country had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). After that, the armed forces of the country with the suspicions entered the territory of the other State and began to look for the WMD. As you all know, they did not find any WMD but did destroy the country. Even now, the country has not recovered. But we did get Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which the entire world is now trying to defeat.

As for space, again I would advise those who are calling for serious attention to be given to the issue of anti-satellite weapons to have a look at their history. In its day, the Soviet Union invited the United States to draft a treaty on that subject. Now guess what the answer was. No, of course. Now I am hearing claims that Russia has anti-satellite weapons. Russia does not have anti-satellite weapons, the United States does not have them and neither does China or any other country. In any case, I have not heard a single report alleging that one or another party possesses anti-satellite weapons. And the opinions of countries as to what other countries do or do not have are often mistaken. I have just given you an example.

Regarding the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, I would like to draw your attention to another pronouncement, which has been widely circulated, including at the Conference on Disarmament. Where the Conference on Disarmament is concerned, this seems a little strange, since we have always thought that the Conference brought together experts on different types of weapons, including nuclear missiles. Of course, the INF Treaty must be considered in its historical context. The Treaty was concluded in 1987, with negotiations on space being held simultaneously. Everybody knows how the negotiations on space ended. The same goes for the INF Treaty. Thus, expert assessments of the place and role of the Treaty can certainly differ. The only thing that will not differ is the tactical and technical specifications of the missiles prohibited by the INF Treaty – those with a range between 500 and 5,500 km. Now tell me: do missiles with a range of even 5,500 km threaten the United States, if of course we do not include American troops deployed in Europe? No. Such missiles do not threaten the national territory of the United States, especially if they are deployed in the European part of Russia. Such missiles could not even threaten Alaska – the range does not allow it. So, distinguished colleagues, let us be accurate in our assessments. This is basic arithmetic, not even requiring any specialist knowledge.

One more thing: during the demonstration and briefing about the 9M729 missile, the Russian military personnel provided its maximum range, confirmed by flight tests, of 480 km. Now compare that to what our American colleagues are saying, including Ms. Poblete yesterday: between 500 and 5,500 km. There might be a discrepancy in the order of tens of kilometres, but not of thousands. That would contradict the laws of physics. So, you need to think for just a moment before talking about a threat to the national security interests of the United States.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his comments. I give the floor now to the gentleman on my far left.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, distinguished diplomatic representatives, it is common knowledge that the President of this forum repeatedly insists on adopting a reprehensible anti-diplomatic attitude and on openly and brazenly violating the rules of procedure of this Conference on Disarmament.

I remind you, Mr. President, that your Government and those that support you in denying the democratic legitimacy of the Government of Nicolás Maduro are a minority in the community of nations.

Distinguished colleagues, Venezuela will assume the presidency and the current President will not be able to stop it unless he resorts to violence, though I believe that he is very unlikely to go to that extreme. My Government, that of Nicolás Maduro Moros, is recognized by most countries around the world and by all United Nations authorities, including the Secretary-General, António Guterres.

Mr. President, stop making a fool of yourself and reassert your good judgment and equanimity. Discharge your duties – and I think most of the countries represented here will join me in making this call – responsibly and transparently so that you might enjoy everyone's respect.

The President: Would any other delegation like to take the floor? That does not seem to be the case. This concludes our business for this morning. The next meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place on Tuesday, 26 March 2019, at 3 p.m. At that meeting, we will be joined by the United States Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Non-Proliferation, Christopher Ford. This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.