

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and fifth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 12 June 2019, at 3.05 p.m.

President: Mr. Jorge Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

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The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call to order the 1505th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, as previously announced, this afternoon we will hold a thematic session on agenda items 5, 6 and 7. The panellists invited are Ambassador Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other international organizations at Geneva, and Ms. Kerstin Vignard, Deputy Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, who will both speak to the Conference on those agenda items.

I propose that, after hearing the presentations, we hold the rest of today's substantive discussion in an informal setting. Therefore, after the interventions of our two panellists, I will suspend the formal plenary meeting and open the floor for an informal discussion. Once your discussion has ended, I will close the informal session and reopen the formal plenary meeting to give the floor to any delegations who wish to take the floor at that point.

Distinguished colleagues, first of all, I would like to welcome Ambassador Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other international organizations at Geneva. Your Excellency, you have the floor.

Mr. Ambrazevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to thank Ambassador Jorge Valero for this opportunity to have a substantive debate on items 5, 6 and 7 of the Conference's agenda. As you know, we had the opportunity to consider these matters in quite some depth last year in subsidiary body 5. We held seven meetings, including four thematic meetings to which eminent experts were invited. The report contained in document CD/2141 was also approved.

We examined important, cross-cutting subjects, on which our work might influence the completion of the "traditional" agenda items and the effectiveness of the Conference's work as a whole. During the expert meetings, we considered issues related to scientific and technological developments and the risks related to the acquisition of new types of weapons of mass destruction. We looked at questions of cybersecurity and the weaponization of artificial intelligence, the spread of weapons of mass destruction among non-State actors, general and complete disarmament and the strengthening of confidence-building measures and transparency. Many aspects of the issues we considered form the centre of attention of the United Nations Secretariat, including the section of the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament entitled "Disarmament for Future Generations".

Synthetic biology, cyberthreats, the use of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems, the risk of the acquisition of the weapons of mass destruction and related materials and technologies by non-State actors: this is a far from complete list of the risks to which experts and delegations have pointed in this room.

On the whole, we consider that our discussions confirmed that member States subscribe to different approaches to the way these issues are viewed and the Conference's potential role in the process. At the same time, none of the member States cast doubt on the necessity of assessing the risks related to scientific and technological developments.

The debates also focused on the vital need for greater accountability on the part of researchers when developing inventions and the importance of the quest for a balance between scientific and technological progress for peaceful means and not allowing the misuse of technology, including dual-use technology.

As coordinator of subsidiary body 5 and, on the whole, as a representative of a country not indifferent to this matter, I would like the Conference to be more zealous about preventing the use of new scientific and technological developments for destructive purposes. Given the rapid development of scientific and technological progress and new technologies, the topics considered by subsidiary body 5 in 2018 may be defined as intersectoral and touching on all aspects of disarmament and non-proliferation.

We consider that the time has come to end the practice of dividing the Conference's agenda into core and other issues. The challenges examined under agenda items 5, 6 and 7 must be considered on an equal footing with nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in space.

The preventive measures which the Conference can take to react to these threats will be a major contribution to non-proliferation and the strengthening of international security. Steps to improve transparency and confidence-building measures will make it possible to reduce tension and arrive at the de-escalation so eagerly awaited by many people. As in the case of nuclear disarmament, we think that a gradual, step-by-step approach would be best. This requires from us simple, effective and meaningful decisions.

Speaking of new kinds of weapons of mass destruction, one preventive measure might consist in the establishment of a mechanism to monitor and assess the impact of new scientific and technological developments on industrial safety. This approach is not new for the United Nations system. An analogous recommendation is contained in the report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work. It calls for the consideration of these factors from the viewpoint of securing a stable and sustainable right to work. An interesting notion.

Many researchers say that the technology of artificial intelligence has the potential for becoming a full-blown weapon of mass destruction. Other forums are already working on this: the Inhumane Weapons Convention contemplates the possibility of applying artificial intelligence to the manufacture of weapons systems on the basis of conventional weapons. Quite recently, the G20 discussed and, as reported in the media, agreed on principles for using artificial intelligence. It was recognized as a guiding principle, *inter alia*, that artificial intelligence systems must be robust, secure and safe throughout their period of use and must not entail any unacceptable risks.

Can the Conference look at the application of artificial intelligence from the viewpoint of ensuring the absence of unacceptable risks to world security? I think this is possible.

The Conference could also consider the topic of preventing weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of non-State actors. Item 6 of the agenda concerns an initiative to draft an international convention to suppress acts of chemical and biological terrorism.

Where does its added value lie? In my opinion, at least in drawing up clear-cut, uniform rules and procedures to prevent chemical and biological weapons falling into the hands of non-State actors, above all in the event of conflicts, but also to destroy chemical and biological weapons and the equipment for making them seized from non-State actors.

Even if we can agree only on these very narrow provisions, it will be a direct contribution which the Conference can present to the Security Council and General Assembly.

Moving forward on issues of transparency, including the role of new technologies and their safeguards, will bring us closer to achieving the goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. We consider that the attainment of this objective, set forth in paragraph 8 of the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, fully covers the questions we are examining today.

At the high-level segment this year, Belarus once again proposed steps which, we think, the Conference could require to be taken.

First, the Conference could ask the Secretary-General to draw up a comprehensive report on the risks and challenges that new technologies pose for international peace and non-proliferation. This would provide a much fuller picture of potentially dangerous technologies and related risks.

Secondly, the Conference could look at existing examples of the best practices of various States with regard to the potential risks and challenges related to new technologies. We think that it is also important to investigate their possible systematization and universal application. The process could lead to the formulation of rules or principles of conduct to prevent the malicious use of new scientific and technological developments.

Thirdly, we proposed moving on to the study and systematization of national measures to counter the efforts of non-State actors to acquire weapons of mass destruction. This activity, which falls within the Conference's mandate, will be a worthy contribution to

the action taken by the United Nations in the fields of non-proliferation and counter-terrorism.

A high-level international conference entitled “Countering terrorism through innovative approaches and the use of new and emerging technologies” will be held in Minsk on 3 and 4 September this year. This event is being jointly organized by Belarus, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Three basic themes will be considered during the conference: misuse of new technologies and artificial intelligence by terrorists; use of new technologies to strengthen detection capacity; and the development of national, regional and international approaches and strategies to address the misuse of new technologies and artificial intelligence in terrorist activities. We hope that this international conference will be a major contribution to global efforts to stem terrorism and the misuse of new technologies. The intention is to present the outcome of the event to the Conference on Disarmament.

I would also like to remind you that, in 2020, Belarus will, as it has done in the past, be presenting for the consideration of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly a draft resolution on the prohibition of the development and manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems for such weapons: report of the Conference on Disarmament. This resolution is directly linked with our activity here in this room. We invite States to reflect on how the resolution can lend fresh impetus to the Conference’s work.

In conclusion, allow me to say that Belarus stands ready to cooperate constructively to these ends with all the member States of the Conference.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Ambassador Ambrazevich for your presentation. I now give the floor to Ms. Kerstin Vignard, Deputy Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Vignard (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)): Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to speak to the Conference on Disarmament about developments since the issuance of the subsidiary body 5 report of 11 September 2018.

I am going to focus my remarks on two topics contained within that report, section B on information and communications technology (ICT) and cybersecurity and section C on the weaponization of artificial intelligence.

On ICT and cybersecurity, the landscape has shifted considerably since the subsidiary body report of last fall, and I am going to highlight two significant changes: the processes set into motion in 2019 by the General Assembly and the focus on multi-stakeholder approaches within these two processes.

Last October, at the First Committee of the General Assembly, as many of you know, we saw the adoption of two General Assembly resolutions on information and communications technology establishing two concurrent processes, both of which will get under way later this year. There is the United States-led resolution 73/266 establishing the sixth Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security. It will be a group of 25 States chaired by Brazil – our very own Ambassador De Aguiar Patriota – meeting in four sessions between 2019 and 2021. The first meeting will thus be in December of this year, while the other ones will be in March and August of next year and, finally, in May 2021. While the mandate is quite similar to previous group mandates, there are two new elements to highlight. First, there are two sorts of consultative mechanism built into this resolution, regional consultations, including with the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the Organization of American States, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. I believe the League of Arab States has also been added. The first of these consultations will take place at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe next week in Bratislava, followed quickly thereafter by the European Union meeting. There is also a second consultative mechanism with all United Nations Member States, similar to what we have seen, for

example, with the most recent Group of Governmental Experts on further effective measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

The second new element of the resolution invites States to submit their views on international law, which will be annexed to the Group's report. As many of you know, international law and how it applies have been a theme throughout Group meetings since 2004, so annexing national positions on this might clear the way for a more productive conversation within the Group.

The second resolution, of course, is the Russian-led resolution 73/27, which established an open-ended working group open to all Member States. It will be chaired by Switzerland and will meet in three sessions, starting in October, with the second session next year in February and a final session in July next summer. This resolution also has consultative mechanisms built into it, focusing on an intersessional meeting of industry, non-governmental organizations and academia.

Last week, in New York, we had both the organizational meeting of the Open-ended Working Group and the UNIDIR annual cyberstability conference. The organizational meeting went extremely quickly and smoothly, with the election of the Chair and an understanding on the rules of procedure. What we saw in the run-up to the organizational meeting as well as at our day-long conference last week was wide interest among non-State actors in the processes and enthusiasm to engage with the consultative mechanisms.

The Group of Governmental Experts and the Open-ended Working Group offer an opportunity for the international community to strengthen and operationalize norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour in cyberspace, to increase cooperation and to contribute to the prevention and peaceful settlement of cyberconflicts. Until now, there has been limited opportunity for States, not to mention other stakeholders, to be part of this discussion, because these groups have been limited, and as a result perhaps, there has been a perception that this topic is the domain of a limited number of States. I think that current events around the world show that that is no longer the case.

It is also true that multi-stakeholder engagement in these issues is growing in magnitude, utility and impact. On the one hand, there is increasing recognition and acceptance that non-State actors have a crucial role to play in these discussions and an even more crucial role to play in operationalizing their outcome. While most of the recommendations made thus far by Groups of Governmental Experts are written for and addressed to States, one cannot, for example, address supply-chain security issues or vulnerability disclosure without working closely with the private sector. On the other hand, it is clear that many States are not 100 per cent at ease with or even used to this multi-stakeholder approach to international security issues and are in somewhat uncharted waters nationally.

Last week, we heard echoes of things that you might want to be looking out for, which had been mentioned as sticking points or concerns: first, how to articulate the changing nature of threats. Each of the Group's reports has started with a section describing the threat landscape. Much has changed since the last consensus report in 2015 – for example, we have seen a Government have part of its cyberstockpiles stolen out from under it, components of which were then unleashed on the world as part of Petya and NotPetya. As you know, those attacks had some companies reporting hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. National health services and other critical infrastructure also suffered.

We have seen whole cities under digital siege, most recently the city of Baltimore, Maryland, where a large number of government offices are no longer functioning due to a ransomware attack. We have seen cyberenabled electoral interference, attempts in States as varied as Norway, Israel, Brazil and Singapore. We have seen massive attacks on the financial system, including the 2016 attack on the central bank of Bangladesh, in which over \$100 million was stolen. And of course there are the technological advances in machine learning in the Internet of things and fifth generation networks and the attack surfaces that they provide.

Another element that you want to be looking out for is, of course, the undermining of the norms that have already been agreed, including in the Group's 2015 and 2013 reports.

The 2015 report in particular was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly, which said that States should be guided in the use of information and communications technology by the recommendations of the report. It would be good to build on that endorsement.

There is, of course, the issue of understanding how international law applies, which I alluded to earlier. A question raised by some delegations in the subsidiary body discussions last year was whether a new legal instrument is necessary or whether current, existing international law is sufficient.

The last point – and this was a theme that was raised repeatedly at our conference last week – was how to keep these processes, particularly the Open-ended Working Group, focused on First Committee issues and prevent them veering into other topics, such as privacy, Internet governance, terrorism and human rights, that are being addressed by other United Nations committees and bodies.

I will also just mention in passing that on Monday, we had the launch of the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. After a year of intense multi-stakeholder consultations and discussions within the Panel itself, the Panel has issued a report that recommends the development of a global commitment to digital trust and security. The Panel states that such a commitment could strengthen implementation of existing or agreed norms, including those contained in the reports of the Group of Governmental Experts.

Turning now to the section on weaponization of artificial intelligence in document CD/2141, much of this section focused on the discussion of lethal autonomous weapons systems within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and, as most of you are actively participating in the Convention process, I will not offer an update on discussions within that forum.

I would instead like to invite you to consider military applications of artificial intelligence in objects other than weapon systems. Every week we hear some article or comment in the media about the impending artificial intelligence (AI) arms race. Rarely when you read those articles do you find that they are actually talking about the increasingly autonomous technologies that we are discussing within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Most of the time, those articles have nothing to do with weapons at all – they are about fierce global strategic competition on artificial intelligence, whether that be economic, technological superiority and perhaps even some military applications, not about arms per se.

Personally, then, I am sceptical of the concept of an AI arms race. I do think we might want to consider or think more deeply about AI arms control. There is perhaps a need to consider whether military applications of artificial intelligence outside weapons systems create conditions of risk or instability that we normally turn to arms control to address. And when I say outside weapons systems, I am referring to military decision-support tools, command-and-control systems, detention decisions, predicted target selection, damage assessments, image recognition and processing such as Project Maven or objects like heads-up displays, like the HoloLens. As everyone in this room knows, arms control measures serve a variety of purposes: they can create stability, codify legal principles or promote compliance with international humanitarian law. Arms control can address risk or increase the safety of systems; it can help us with our ethics and values, and those are just a few of its purposes. These seem to be desirable goals for military applications of artificial intelligence. We might also want to consider what AI confidence-building measures might look like in a world where it is technologically possible, easily and at low cost, to produce and disseminate fake written, audio and visual content. At a time characterized by international tensions and distrust, we may need to actively seek digital stability measures to help slow down possible crisis escalation.

Just this last week, Samsung researchers in Russia were able to create a video from a single image, and researchers from Adobe, Stanford, Princeton and the Max Planck Institute for Informatics were able to alter the audio of a video clip to literally insert words into someone's mouth. What is interesting about that, if you see the clip, is that when the test subjects were shown the original real clip and the modified clip, a larger percentage said the modified clip was the real one.

In conclusion, section A of the report of subsidiary body 5 concerns developments in science and technology. It is noted that some delegations suggested the need to monitor relevant developments in science and technology. I am pleased to remind you that on 19 August, UNIDIR will convene its first Innovations Dialogue. This meeting was requested by Member States in resolution 73/32 on the role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament. The Innovations Dialogue will consider developments in science and technology that are not currently being addressed in existing disarmament processes. The idea is to consider both the potential beneficial applications and the challenges or risks of emerging technological innovations, to help build shared understandings of these quite complex technologies and, of course, to promote multi-stakeholder engagement.

The theme of this year's dialogue is on digital technologies. Of course, there is a variety of United Nations processes under way that touch on digital technologies. I have just mentioned several of them: the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, the Open-ended Working Group, the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and the Group of Governmental Experts related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems. On 19 August, we will be considering the international dimension of digital innovations that are not currently on the disarmament agenda. These include quantum computing, the Internet of things, distributed ledger technology, which many of you know as blockchain, and AI and military applications other than weapons systems.

So the Innovations Dialogue is really going to help us get our heads around what these innovations mean for international security, including, as I said beneficial applications for arms control objectives such as using distributed ledger technology to create immutable end-user certificates. This inaugural dialogue is generously supported by Germany, India, Qatar and Switzerland. We look forward to seeing you there.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Ms. Vignard, for your presentation. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to make the necessary technical arrangements to continue in an informal setting in order to give the opportunity to those delegations so wishing to speak freely.

The meeting was suspended at 3.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The meeting is resumed. I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you for your professional and able leadership during your presidency, for all your efforts and for those of your team and the secretariat.

I would like to deliver this statement on behalf of the States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT):

The Group of 21 would like to stress, once again, that the Conference on Disarmament is the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum mandated by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and emphasizes the importance of preserving it by strengthening the nature, role and mandate of this body. We must underscore the need to redouble our efforts in order to reinforce and revitalize the Conference and preserve its credibility through the resumption of substantive work, including negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The Group of 21 reaffirms its working paper on nuclear disarmament contained in document CD/2135, and all the other working papers submitted to the Conference in 2018.

Nuclear disarmament continues to be the highest priority of the international community. The Group of 21 reiterates its deep concern over the danger posed to the survival of humankind by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and of their possible use or threat of use. The Group, stressing its strong commitment to nuclear disarmament, underscores the urgent need to commence negotiations on this issue in the Conference, without further delay. As the highest priority, the Conference should

start negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, including a nuclear-weapon convention prohibiting the possession, development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use of nuclear weapons, leading to the global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons, with a specified framework of time. In this context, the Group recalls its working paper, contained in document CD/2063, that calls for the urgent commencement of negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament, in particular on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction.

The Group welcomes the formal proclamation, for the first time in history, of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace, on the occasion of the second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Havana, Cuba, on 28–29 January 2014. The proclamation includes a commitment by all States of that region to further nuclear disarmament as a priority goal and to contribute to general and complete disarmament. This proclamation, it is hoped, will be followed by other political proclamations of zones of peace in other regions of the world. The Group welcomes the Political Declaration of Quito, adopted at the fourth Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Quito, Ecuador, on 27 January 2016, which reaffirms, *inter alia*, the commitment of the Community to the preservation of peace and international security, political independence and nuclear disarmament conducive to general, total and verifiable disarmament. The Group also welcomes the Political Declaration of Punta Cana, adopted at the fifth Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on 25 January 2017, which reaffirms the commitment of the Community to the total prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. The Community reaffirms its commitment to the consolidation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace and highlights its character as the first-ever zone free of nuclear weapons, as established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco. The Group welcomes the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco on 14 February 2017 in Mexico, in the framework of the twenty-fifth session of the General Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Group also welcomes the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, known as the Treaty of Pelindaba, signed in Cairo, Egypt, in 1996. The Treaty, which came into effect on 15 July 2009, seeks to prevent the stationing of nuclear explosive devices and prohibit the testing of nuclear weapons and the dumping of radioactive waste on the continent. For the purpose of ensuring compliance with the obligations under the Treaty, the African Commission on Nuclear Energy was established.

The Group reaffirms the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation and expresses its determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in these areas. The Group welcomes the convening of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament on 26 September 2013 and reaffirms resolution 72/251, adopted by the General Assembly in follow-up to this meeting. As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations rightly mentioned in the Conference in 2015, “the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament demonstrated that this issue remains a major international priority and deserves attention at the highest levels”. In this vein, the Group fully supports the goals of resolution 72/251, in particular the General Assembly’s call for an urgent decision by the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiations on nuclear disarmament, including a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction. The Group of 21 will make a separate statement in the Conference on Disarmament plenary meeting on this issue. The Group also welcomes the decision to convene, in New York, on a date to be decided later, a United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament to review the progress made in this regard. The Group welcomes the

establishment of 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly organized every year to commemorate and promote this international day.

The Group reaffirms the importance of multilateral disarmament machinery. It notes the report of the Open-ended Working Group mandated by the General Assembly “to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons” and hopes that it will contribute to negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference, particularly a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction.

Mr. President, the Group takes note of the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 7 July 2017 at the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, held, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/258, from 27 to 31 March and 15 June to 7 July 2017 in New York.

The Group reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Pending the achievement of the complete elimination of such weapons, the Group reaffirms the urgent need for the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument to effectively assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as a matter of high priority. The Group expresses concern that despite the commitment of the nuclear-weapon States and long-standing requests by the non-nuclear-weapon States to receive such legally binding assurances, no tangible progress has been achieved in this regard. It is a matter of more concern that non-nuclear-weapon States have been subject, implicitly or explicitly, to nuclear threats by some nuclear-weapon States, contrary to their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. The Group also calls for the commencement of negotiations in order to reach agreement on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/74.

The Group expresses its deepest concern over the immediate, indiscriminate and massive death and destruction caused by any nuclear-weapon detonation and its long-term catastrophic consequences on human health, the environment and other vital economic resources, thus endangering the life of present and future generations. The Group believes that full awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches, efforts and international commitments towards nuclear disarmament, through an inclusive process involving all States.

In this context, the Group concurs with the statement by the former United Nations Secretary-General on 23 May 2015 to the effect that there is a growing understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. In this regard, it welcomes the hosting of the conferences on this subject, convened in Oslo in March 2013, in Mexico in February 2014 and in Vienna in December 2014.

The States parties of the Group of 21 to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty welcome the spirit of the findings of the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. We call upon all nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty to implement their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament, to which all States parties are committed under article VI. Given the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and unacceptable risks and threats associated with a nuclear-weapon detonation, we will endeavour to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders in efforts to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. In this regard, we note the relevant resolutions adopted at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly.

The Group of 21 expresses its disappointment that the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to undertake substantive work on its agenda. The Group takes note

of various efforts to reach consensus on the Conference's programme of work and all subsequent decisions, efforts and proposals towards this end.

The Group reiterates the urgency for the Conference to execute its mandate as set out by Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and to adopt and implement a balanced and comprehensive programme of work on the basis of its agenda, while taking into account the security interests of all States and dealing with, *inter alia*, the core issues, including nuclear disarmament, in accordance with the rules of procedure, not least the rule of consensus. The Group encourages you, Mr. President, to spare no effort and to continue wide consultations with all delegations to the Conference to achieve this goal.

The Group furthermore believes that promoting the work of the United Nations disarmament machinery hinges on the need to exercise political will, taking into account the collective security interests of all States.

While expressing its deep concern over the persistent lack of consensus on the implementation of the multilateral disarmament agenda in the United Nations disarmament machinery, particularly in fulfilling the commitments on nuclear disarmament as the highest priority, the Group reaffirms its support for an early convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and expresses its deep concern over the fact that the fourth special session is yet to be convened. The Group welcomes the successful outcome of the Open-ended Working Group, convened by resolution 65/66 of the General Assembly and its decision 70/551, which held its substantive sessions in 2016 and 2017 under the able chairmanship of Ecuador, adopting, by consensus, recommendations for the objectives and agenda for the fourth special session, reaffirming the importance of the existing United Nations disarmament machinery, while considering ways to strengthen it and improve its effectiveness. The Group welcomes the endorsement by the General Assembly of the report of the Open-ended Working Group and the substantive recommendations contained therein.

The Group of 21 reiterates the importance of the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and acknowledges the decision contained in General Assembly resolution 73/546 that entrusts the Secretary-General to convene a conference to elaborate a treaty on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. The Group calls upon all States to actively support this conference and to contribute to its success.

The States parties of the Group of 21 to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty express their disappointment and deep concern that three States parties, including two States that bear special responsibility as Treaty depositary States and co-sponsors of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference resolution on the Middle East, blocked consensus on the draft outcome document of the ninth NPT Review Conference, including the process to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, as contained in the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. This could undermine efforts towards strengthening the NPT regime as a whole. The Group of 21 reaffirms that the 1995 resolution on the Middle East continues to constitute the basis for the establishment of such a zone and that the 1995 resolution remains valid until fully implemented. The States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty also express their serious concern over the lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution and, in accordance with paragraph 6 of this resolution, "call upon all States party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to extend their cooperation and to exert their utmost efforts with a view to ensuring the early establishment by regional parties of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction" and reaffirm that the co-sponsors of the resolution must take all the necessary measures to fully implement it without further delay. The Group of 21 expresses its utmost concern that the persistent lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution, contrary to the decisions made at the relevant

NPT Review Conferences, erodes the credibility of the Treaty and disrupts the delicate balance among its three pillars, taking into account that the indefinite extension of the Treaty is inextricably linked to the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. In this context, the Group of 21 reaffirms the urgency of Israel's accession to the Treaty without further delay and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. While the lack of agreement on an outcome document could undermine the NPT regime, the States parties of the Group of 21 to the Treaty emphasize the continued validity of the commitments made in 1995, 2000 and 2010, particularly the unequivocal undertaking towards nuclear disarmament, and call for their full implementation without further delay.

The Group recognizes the importance of continuing consultations on the question of the possibility of expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Group emphasizes the urgent need to address the prevalent dichotomy between the lack of progress in disarmament and increasing emphasis and efforts on non-proliferation. The Group calls upon all member States to manifest their support for, and investment in, disarmament and non-proliferation education in a balanced and comprehensive manner through training and fellowships provided by the United Nations, as a priority. In this context, the Group welcomes the annual fellowship programme on disarmament and international security affairs instituted by India in 2019.

Finally, Mr. President, the Group also recognizes the importance of enhancing engagement between civil society and the Conference, in accordance with decisions taken by the Conference, and continues to support the strengthening of the Conference's interaction with civil society. In this regard, the Group welcomes the convening of the Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum on 19 March 2015 and the second informal civil society forum on 22 June 2016, as well as the Conference on Disarmament/civil society dialogue held on 17 August 2018.

I have to again emphasize that this was the general statement of the Group of 21, which was delivered in the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Your Excellency, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, for your intervention on behalf of the Group of 21 and for your kind words to the presidency.

I would like to ask whether any other delegation wishes to take the floor. As that seems not to be the case, before concluding today's business, I have the pleasure to inform you that, following extensive bilateral consultations and regional group meetings, the presidency requested the secretariat to circulate the first revised version of the programme, Rev.1. This revised version, which was circulated a few minutes ago by the secretariat, is the result of comments made at last week's plenary meeting and during the consultations carried out to date.

I have had the honour of attending, with 30 ambassadors and members of delegations, bilateral meetings which have been extremely useful in improving this first revised version. I should however emphasize that I intend to continue listening to your concerns and proposals, and to incorporate your comments into the draft programme of work, which I will present in the appropriate meeting. As you will see, the presidency has made an effort to recognize the important work of the subsidiary bodies established in 2018, to standardize the mandates of the working groups and to identify a specific mechanism to ensure the continuity of our work with a view to establishing a multi-year programme – a proposal presented by several delegations in the plenary meeting last Thursday 6 June.

We ask that you study this new proposal in a positive spirit, and be assured that the presidency will act transparently and continue progressing with the consultations as broadly and inclusively as possible.

At the meeting to be held tomorrow, 13 June, after the substantive discussion on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, the delegations will be able to make more

specific comments on draft 0 and the programme of work; and we will welcome preliminary comments on the revised draft that we distributed a few minutes ago.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all the delegations that participated constructively today in the presidency's consultations and plenary meetings. We have worked with full transparency and inclusiveness, and have thus been able to consult with many delegations, and adapt the presidency's plans and our proposal for the programme of work. In this regard, I once again invite you to participate actively in this process.

Would any other delegation like to take the floor? As that seems not to be the case, we will conclude our work for today. The next plenary meeting will be held tomorrow, 13 June 2019, and will be a thematic session on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The meeting will hear statements from Mr. Andrey Belousov, Ambassador and Alternate Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, Mr. De Aguiar Patriota, Ambassador and President of the Group of Governmental Experts on Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, and Mr. Daniel Porras of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.

I also intend to continue our discussion on the programme of work, and any preliminary comments on the first revised version of the programme of work will be welcome. The presidency, with the support of the secretariat, has provided for the possibility of holding a meeting tomorrow afternoon if necessary, for delegations to put forward their ideas, opinions and proposals, on the basis of which we will assess the possibility of presenting a second revised version.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.