

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 June 2019, at 3.15 p.m.

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

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The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call to order the 1507th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Distinguished colleagues, it is my pleasure to inform you that, following extensive bilateral consultation with 30 ambassadors and delegates, and with regional groups, the presidency has asked the Secretariat to circulate the first revised version of the programme of work, contained in document CD/WP.620/Rev.1, which was distributed yesterday afternoon. This revised version is the result of your comments at the plenary meeting held last week and during the bilateral consultations and consultations with regional groups that we have undertaken to date.

Allow me to clarify the changes that have been made to the document. As you will see, in the preamble, the presidency has recognized the significant work of the subsidiary bodies established in 2018. We have also tried to standardize the working groups' mandates and give equal treatment to delegations' interests in relation to the different agenda items. We have opted this time for a much more realistic mandate, taking into account the current circumstances of the Conference on Disarmament and the progress made in our discussions so far this year. We believe that the mandate that we have established for the working groups will assist in identifying and agreeing elements of consensus for the later negotiation of legally binding documents.

Paragraph 8 (b) of the previous version has been considerably reformulated in paragraph 9 (b) of this document. We have drawn on the language of previous drafts, while attempting to incorporate the special processes developed under the aegis of the United Nations. For the previous paragraph 8 (e), we have also proposed alternative language to the reference to a convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism, in an effort to preserve the essence of the initial proposal. In paragraphs 10 to 14, we have tried to provide greater clarification on the functioning of the working groups. We believe that we have succeeded in offering a solution to the difficulties encountered by the Conference each year in identifying working group coordinators. Under our proposal, the working groups will be convened by the President, with the guarantee that they will be allocated equal time, in line with a calendar that could be presented at a later date.

Paragraphs 15 and 16 attempt to address some of the comments made on the need to ensure continuity of work while preserving and respecting the Conference's rules of procedure and the prerogative of future Presidents to present proposals. We have proposed a mechanism whereby the President would launch consultations with the Presidents for 2019 and 2020 under rule 9 of the rules of procedure, so that future Presidents may present this programme of work in 2020, if deemed appropriate by the Conference. The aim of this would be to ensure continuity of work without prejudicing any other decision related to the Conference's agenda for 2020.

The intention is to move forward. This proposal does not require a change to the rules of procedure, nor does it prejudice any initiatives or updates that future Presidents may wish to undertake. In fact, the presidency is convinced that the efforts of the Presidents must be geared towards establishing an improved programme of work with a negotiating mandate, as set out in the Conference's rules of procedure. Once again, we would ask you to study this new proposal closely, in a spirit of optimism and constructiveness. We are aware that delegations will need time to send the proposal to their capitals; we do not, therefore, expect detailed comments on this revised version today, but we would welcome at least general observations or initial comments on the document's most salient aspects.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank once again all the delegations that have so far worked constructively during the plenary meetings and consultations with the presidency. Again, I invite them to participate actively in this process. During the first plenary meeting on the programme of work, some delegations indicated that they had submitted version 0 of the programme to their capitals for consideration. I would therefore like to open the floor to any delegations that wish to provide comments or specific assessments of that version of the draft programme. I see that the Russian Federation has requested the floor; you have the floor.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Mr. President, for organizing these consultations on the updated draft programme of work for the Conference. I have one small technical comment on the text, specifically on paragraph 9 (a),

where it refers to different negotiating options: I think, for consistency, the letter “s” should be added to the word “negotiation”.

With regard to the text as a whole, the Russian Federation believes that an attempt has been made to move in the right direction in the work being carried out by the Venezuelan delegation taking into account the views of various delegations; we consider it important work that we can assess positively. With respect to the proposed changes, we believe that they deserve careful consideration, and we will of course consult with our capital and will be ready to share our position at a later stage. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his comments, and I would like to give the floor to the Ambassador of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to join the previous speaker in thanking you for your efforts to take forward our work and for distributing the revised version of the programme of work as contained in CD/WP.620/Rev.1. We see a number of revisions in the draft text, which we have sent to our capital. While we await their comments, I would like to make a few preliminary remarks and also raise a couple of queries.

As you mentioned, there is a major change in subparagraph 9 (b) whereby the reference to document CD/1299 has been taken out. We are disappointed to see this change as, in our view, that document and the mandate contained therein was agreed by consensus in this Conference on Disarmament and remains the most suitable basis on which future negotiations should commence.

While there is now no reference to CD/1299, we do see new language referring to “the outcomes of the special processes regarding to this issue”. It is not clear what these “special processes” are and we would like to seek clarity from you about them, without which the term remains very abstract. Similarly, we would also like to seek some clarity about “critical infrastructure protection” and “multilateral arrangements on transparency”, as referred to in subparagraph 9 (e), particularly since that subparagraph covers three agenda items.

At the same time, we would like to express our satisfaction at the inclusion of the concept of continuity in the work of the Conference, as suggested in paragraph 15, so that we do not have to start from scratch at the beginning of each year. We cannot afford to lose the precious work carried out by past presidencies, by your presidency, or by this year’s future presidencies. This trend needs to be arrested and we are happy that you have addressed this issue. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, distinguished Ambassador of India. Undoubtedly, your opinion requires us to try to find language that is much more compatible with the interests of all delegations, particularly with regard to the former paragraph 8 (b); we will therefore try, in any future versions we present, to make adjustments in consultation with delegations. I would now like to give the floor to the distinguished delegation of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, I would like first to thank you and your team for providing the new draft programme of work and to express my admiration for the work you have done, which fully reflects the very serious and responsible efforts made by the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, as it assumes the Conference’s rotating presidency, to prepare the Conference to embark on substantive work.

I have also noted that there has been a relatively large number of adjustments between the previous draft and the one now before us. While we await formal instructions from our capital, I would like to share our initial impressions. The first concerns what is said in subparagraph 9 (b) about the Shannon mandate. Some colleagues have already spoken about this in their statements. We believe that we have already reached consensus regarding some of the wording of the Shannon mandate, and that that should be reflected here.

My second preliminary thought relates to the new content of paragraph 15, which I find to be a very innovative idea. I think on the whole, it will help ensure continuity in the Conference's work and make it more efficient. The Chinese delegation is prepared to carefully study this new programme of work and the related paragraphs in a positive and constructive manner and to maintain close communications on them with you, your team and the other members of the Conference. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, distinguished representative of China, for your comments and your support for the presidency. I now give the floor to the distinguished delegation of Indonesia.

Mr. Bektikusuma (Indonesia): First of all, Mr. President, allow me once again, on behalf of my delegation, to thank you and your team for your hard work and for the distribution of the updated version of the draft programme of work. We really appreciate your efforts and I think that the number of delegations attending our meeting this afternoon does not do justice to the important document that you have shared with us. I believe that others are not here because they are still holding extensive consultations with their respective capitals. So I expect that we will have many more participants in the forthcoming sessions.

Mr. President, we have sent your draft programme of work to our capital and we are still waiting for the response. Although we have received an initial response on your previous draft, I do not think it would be relevant to share that assessment today, since you have circulated a new version. Nevertheless, please allow me to share our preliminary views on this updated draft.

First of all, we are still of the view that the programme of work should consist mainly of a schedule of activities based on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. We consider that a programme of work needs to be nothing more than a list of projected activities accompanied by a timetable for carrying them out. However, we are more than happy to discuss your new updated draft.

In respect of preambular paragraph 7, we appreciate that you take into consideration the work that has been carried out by all of the Conference's subsidiary bodies. Nevertheless, regarding the reference to the reports of the subsidiary bodies contained in documents CD/2138, CD/2139, CD/2140 and CD/2141 of 11 September 2018, and notwithstanding our appreciation of those subsidiary bodies that managed to conclude and adopt their reports in a consensus manner, my delegation still wishes to be cautious in this regard because we are of the view that the negative security assurances are one of our priorities and are a low-hanging fruit that we can put on the negotiating table. I do not think that referring to the four reports of the subsidiary bodies does justice to the importance of all the core issues and agenda items of the Conference. So I think we will propose language formulations to address this concern, which we will submit to you or your team.

Mr. President, we appreciate the extensive consultations you have held. We see that you have taken into consideration suggestions from delegations, including my own, on subparagraphs (a) to (e) of operative paragraph 9, and we are pleased that you tried to strike a balance between the working groups by using the same wording for each. I think that we are making progress towards an improved draft. We understand that some delegations might have concerns about subparagraph 9 (b), without prejudice to the position of my own delegation, which as you know, Mr. President, is to give priority to nuclear disarmament and to support negotiations on fissile material and on existing stockpiles. Nevertheless, we respect the position of other delegations who still have some concerns about this paragraph and we encourage those delegations to hold extensive consultations with you in order to follow up on those issues.

Mr. President, I know that the proposed language of paragraph 15 was formulated on the basis of suggestions made by one delegation and perhaps by several delegations. Nevertheless, my delegation would like to be cautious about this paragraph. I think we need to know the political and procedural implications before we adopt it. I believe you have conducted intensive consultations with upcoming Presidents, including those of 2020; however, I am not sure whether it is appropriate for us to prejudge, in a way, the decisions of a forthcoming presidency. I do understand considerations such as the importance of

saving time and the desire to be more effective, but we might first wish to scrutinize the implications of this formulation.

Last but not least, Mr. President, my delegation is still awaiting the timetable that you mention in paragraph 12, considering that it is very important for us to see the schedule of activities and the way in which you will allocate time to the working groups, since we all understand that time is very limited this session. If I am not mistaken, we only have about nine weeks left and the presidency of Zimbabwe will focus on the report of the Conference. Therefore, I need to see how you allocate that time, not least because we also have a very packed agenda in disarmament, including meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention and other forums. Small delegations like my own need to arrange their time so that we can participate in the best possible manner in the work of the Conference and of other disarmament forums.

I will return with more specific input from my capital with regard to your new updated draft programme of work, and I will keep in close contact with you and your team. Thank you, Mr. President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the distinguished representative of Indonesia for his constructive comments and his support for the presidency. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Egypt.

Mr. Elsayed (Egypt): Thank you, Mr. President. First, allow me to express my sincere appreciation of all of the efforts that you have undertaken. Like other delegations, we have sent the revised draft programme of work that you circulated to our capital and we are now awaiting further instructions. However, we have some initial comments and queries.

Mr. President, we welcome the introduction of the preambular paragraph stating that the Conference on Disarmament builds upon the work of the subsidiary bodies established in 2018 and takes into account the reports of those subsidiary bodies and the final report on its 2018 session. We share the concerns expressed by the distinguished delegate of Indonesia regarding negative security assurances, considering that the non-adoption of the report on negative security assurances does not diminish the importance of this topic and that language should be added to this paragraph to ensure that it has equal status with other agenda items.

We also appreciate that you have acknowledged our remarks on the consistency of the language by adding “to discuss options for negotiations, with a view to reaching an agreement” to all subparagraphs of paragraph 9, although we would have preferred to maintain the phrase “to negotiate, with a view to reaching agreement”, which was used in the first version of the draft programme of work.

Furthermore, regarding the concerns or remarks that were expressed by the delegate of China and the Ambassador of India on the absence from subparagraph 9 (b) of a reference to the Shannon mandate and document CD/1299, we see such a reference as being very important, considering that it is the Conference’s usual practice to cite document CD/1299 in connection with any working groups or subsidiary bodies that address the issue of fissile materials. Therefore, we wish to retain the mention of CD/1299.

In the previous session, my delegation listened very carefully to the proposals made by certain delegations and we know that you have attempted to include those proposals in your draft programme of work. Nevertheless, for my delegation it is not very clear how the consultations proposed in paragraph 15 would be conducted, how the President would review and reflect the conclusions that might emerge from them, and whether or not the member States would be involved in the process.

My delegation also believes that any attempt to ensure the continuity of the work of the Conference should be in accordance with the rules of procedure and that, although you have mentioned rule 9, it would make much sense to mention rule 28, which we think is of specific importance in this context. We would also like to reiterate that such an attempt should not in any way infringe on the negotiating mandate of the Conference.

Mr. President, we believe that time is of the essence and we support you in your efforts to reach a consensus on this programme of work very soon.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the distinguished delegate of Egypt for his comments and his support for the presidency. I now give the floor to the distinguished delegation of Mexico.

Ms. Escobar Bautista (Mexico): Thank you, Mr. President. We would first like to thank you for the hard work you have put into this draft. We are still waiting for comments from our capital, but we can express our concern at the amendments made.

My delegation has clearly expressed its concerns about subsidiary bodies, so we are not very happy with their inclusion. We are also concerned by the fact that you have removed the mandate to negotiate from subparagraphs 9 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) and would like to make it clear that this is not acceptable to us. Once we hear back from our capital we will inform you of any more specific comments.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the distinguished delegate of Mexico for her comments. I now give the floor to the distinguished delegation of Pakistan.

Mr. Jadoon (Pakistan): Mr. President, thank you very much for circulating this revised version of the draft programme of work. We deeply appreciate the transparent manner in which you have conducted consultations and in which you are gathering these views and comments. You have indeed fulfilled the role of the President of the Conference on Disarmament to put forward a realistic proposal which can enjoy consensus in this body. You have been very receptive, I would say, in trying to find a solution that can be acceptable to all States parties.

Firstly, like my distinguished colleague from Indonesia, I would like to recognize that very few delegations are present in the room – either by choice or for some unknown reason – with the result that this discussion is not being held in a very representative setting. Secondly, my delegation wishes to report that, having sent this draft to its capital and not yet having received any instructions from Islamabad, it too reserves its position. However, I wish to make a couple of comments in response to hearing views from the floor.

Mr. President, we note that you have tried to bring this document CD/WP.620/Rev.1 into quite close alignment with the draft decision that was circulated by the presidency of the United Kingdom in March 2019 in document CD/WP.619/Rev.2, as orally amended. You will recall that that draft contained the proposed mandates of four working groups or subsidiary bodies – whereas this one has proposed mandates for five – and that the mandates proposed were exactly identical in all respects. Although we welcome and appreciate the fact that you have proposed a fifth working group dealing with agenda items 5, 6, and 7 to cover some new and emerging issues, we note that a distinction has been created in subparagraph 9 (b), so that the mandate described therein is different from those proposed in subparagraphs (a), (c), (d) and (e). In particular, subparagraph (b) includes references to “a ban of the production of fissile material” and to “taking into account the outcomes of special processes”.

This is not acceptable to my delegation because it changes the overall balance of the entire text, with subparagraph (b) differing from the others. We would therefore kindly request you to remove the amended text so that this document is internally consistent and so that all of the proposed working groups have similar mandates.

And as you and other colleagues are well aware, as far as this particular issue, namely agenda item 2 as addressed under subparagraph 9 (b), is concerned, the position of my delegation is that we cannot base our work on the so-called Shannon mandate, which has outlived its utility and is no longer valid. It is not acceptable to my delegation, and whatever tenuous consensus that existed on that document in 1995 no longer exists – it is a non-starter. No document including a reference to the Shannon mandate stands any reasonable chance of success or consensus.

Lastly, Mr. President, there is also a need for further consideration of paragraph 15, which is a novel idea to somehow try to achieve some continuity for 2020. The draft paragraph does not appear to us to be in conformity with the rules of procedure, with the

responsibilities entrusted to the individual presidencies or with their prerogatives for tabling different proposals and programmes of work. But I assure you, Mr. President, that we will be very flexible and very cooperative with you and with other delegations, and very constructive in seeking to arrive at a text that enjoys consensus, so you can count on our full support.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the distinguished representative of Pakistan for his constructive comments and for his support for the presidency, and I assure him that we will continue to work tirelessly to attempt to bring together the different positions that exist on the issues and paragraphs to which he refers.

Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? It appears not; the presidency therefore proposes that we continue our bilateral consultations over the coming days. We will certainly step up the pace of our work and try to meet with most delegations. We also hope, of course, that you will share with us the input you receive from your respective capitals.

Lastly, I wish to inform you that the next plenary meeting will take place on Tuesday, 18 June 2019, when we will continue our discussion of the programme of work. As I have mentioned, any specific, detailed comments by delegations on the first revised version of the programme of work will be welcome. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.