

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 13 August 2019, at 3.10 p.m.

President: Mr. Duong Chi Dung(Viet Nam)

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The President: I call to order the 1516th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, at the start of the plenary meeting today, I have the pleasure to inform you that, further to my letter of 5 August 2019, which I sent to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in my capacity as the President of the Conference, Mr. Antonio Guterres informed me on 6 August that he had appointed Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, as Secretary-General of the Conference, in accordance with rule 13 of the rules of procedure.

As previously announced, the plenary meeting today will be devoted to consultations on the draft decision on possible elements for a programme of work, contained in document CD/WP.622, and the working paper submitted by the Netherlands, entitled “Back to basics – the programme of work”.

I will briefly open the floor for any delegation that wishes to speak in a formal setting and then move to an informal discussion. Once that discussion concludes, the formal meeting will resume and I will open the floor for delegations to address any other matters they would like to raise.

I recognize the representative of Argentina. You have the floor.

Mr. Proffen (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the commendable efforts that you and your team are making to lay the foundations that will allow future presidencies to structure and consolidate the substantive dialogue at the beginning of each annual session. I would also like to express appreciation for the work carried out by the distinguished delegation of the Netherlands on the proposal to resume the practice of adopting the programme of work, as used to be done in the early years of the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President, our sense from the rich debate we are having is that there would be a collective interest in capitalizing on the work carried out by previous presidencies by identifying possible components for a programme of work that could be considered by future presidencies. In this respect, we believe that the adoption and implementation of a programme of work that refers only to a schedule of activities and does not include a decision on the establishment of subsidiary bodies would be the most viable option, taking into account the over 20 years of stalemate during which this body has not been able to adopt a programme of work. And when it did so, on just one occasion, it failed to implement it. We believe that this approach better reflects rules 27 and 28 of the rules of procedure. We believe that the two rules complement and reinforce each other and should be interpreted together. In this regard, we understand that the formulation of the agenda and the planning of activities must take into account the recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly, the proposals presented by the member States of the Conference on Disarmament and the decisions of the Conference itself.

On the understanding that the proposals of States and the Conference decisions are well known, we believe that it would be constructive to mention certain recommendations that the General Assembly has been making to the Conference to improve its functioning, which are agreed in the resolutions adopted in the annual reports of this body. In this regard, we would like to share the following details: first, the General Assembly’s concern about the Conference’s inability to adopt a programme of work was first addressed in 1996 and has evolved significantly over 20 years; second, the resolution on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and promoting multilateral disarmament negotiations, adopted in 2011, urges the Conference not only to adopt a programme of work but also to implement it. Both issues are essential. Third, for more than two decades, the General Assembly has made recommendations on the Conference’s programme of work every year. This process has crystallized a number of issues that were repeated in the resolutions, namely: (a) adopting and implementing a balanced and comprehensive programme of work; (b) ensuring that this happens as soon as possible, preferably at the beginning of sessions; and (c) using document CD/1864 as a basis.

Mr. President, we believe that these suggestions that the General Assembly has been making to the Conference for over 20 years could be considered as elements to be taken into account by future presidencies. This is not only because they are in line with the Conference’s rules of procedure but also because they have all been agreed by consensus within the General Assembly. Thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. Now I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, I would like to return to the first issue raised by the Ambassador of Viet Nam in his capacity as President – namely, the letter from the Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to the decision of the Conference on Disarmament on the appointment of Ms. Valovaya as Secretary-General of the Conference.

I would like to ask the President and perhaps the secretariat for clarification regarding Mr. Guterres's response. Do we understand correctly that the reference to rule 13 of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament means that Ms. Valovaya was appointed not only Secretary-General of the Conference but also Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Conference?

This is an important point, because your letter on the outcome of consultations on this issue with the States members of the Conference states clearly that the Conference agrees to the appointment of Ms. Valovaya as both Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Conference. In Mr. Guterres's letter, however, there is no reference to the second post. It is important for us – for the Russian delegation, first and foremost, as the candidate is Russian – to know exactly what is meant by Mr. Guterres's letter. Do we understand what the letter says and the reference to rule 13 of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament correctly?

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his statement. I would like to give the floor to the secretariat for further clarification. You have the floor.

Ms. Day (Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his queries. I can confirm that the letter from the Secretary-General of the United Nations indeed made reference to rule 13 of the rules of procedure, which – as implied in the statement of the representative of the Russian Federation – states that the person appointed to the position of Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament shall also act as the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I therefore confirm the reading by the representative of the Russian Federation. Thank you.

The President: I thank the secretariat for the explanation. I give the floor to the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, I apologize for taking the floor again. I would like to thank you and the secretariat for your work on this issue and for the clarification that has just been provided, to avoid further misunderstandings of the decision of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his statement. Are there any other delegations who wish to take the floor in this formal setting? I see none. I have no more speakers on the list of speakers, so I will now suspend the meeting and we will move to an informal discussion.

The meeting was suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 5.05 p.m.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor in a formal setting? I see none.

Excellencies, dear colleagues, over the past few weeks and even until the last minute of today's discussion, we have held very enriching discussions on the possible elements for a programme of work and have received many valuable ideas and proposals. We all share the feeling that now is not the right moment for adopting a draft decision, because time is against us. However, I believe these discussions have provided useful elements for the future work of the Conference on Disarmament. For that reason, I intend to present a President's statement containing an assessment of the work done by my presidency and my views and suggestions on the ideas and proposals put forward by member States during plenary meetings and in various bilateral and multilateral consultations.

The next plenary meeting will take place tomorrow, 14 August 2019, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. It will be the last plenary meeting that I intend to convene under the Vietnamese presidency, and it will begin with an address by Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, the new Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference, also acting as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. This will be followed by a panel discussion on agenda item 3, “Prevention of an arms race in outer space”, with the participation of Ambassador Gennady Gatilov of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Juan Eduardo Eguiguren of Chile and Mr. Daniel Porras from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research as panellists.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.