

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and twenty-fourth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 21 January 2020, at 3.15 p.m.

President: Mr. Rachid Belbaki (Algeria)

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The President (*spoke in French*): I call to order the 1524th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you for coming together again this afternoon. As I mentioned at the end of this morning's meeting, there are still about 10 speakers who wish to take the floor. I will therefore give them the floor. The first speaker on the list is the representative of Austria.

Mr. Müller (Austria): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on assuming the first presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2020. Austria fully supports your efforts. We particularly welcome the approach of Conference Presidents truly working together as a team and the remarks made in the previous meeting by the other representatives of the six member States that will occupy the presidency this session.

Austria aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and with the statement you delivered, Mr. President, on behalf of the six Presidents of this session. As Austria is one of the countries that has the honour to preside over the Conference in 2020, I will focus my intervention on the start of this year's session.

In the year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, it is our particular responsibility to demonstrate that multilateralism matters. In our interconnected world, many of today's challenges have a global impact. Global challenges cannot be solved unilaterally, but need global solutions.

Disarmament is a particular case in point. The contribution of disarmament to international security should not be underestimated, and in times of heightened geopolitical tensions seems particularly important. Despite the urgent need to ease tensions and build trust and confidence, in recent years we have witnessed a worrying trend in the erosion of the arms control architecture, coupled with increased investment in armaments, nuclear modernization efforts and the development of new, previously unthinkable weapons and new means, methods and areas of warfare. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending in 2018 amounted to \$1.8 trillion, a 2.6 per cent increase compared with 2017. Just imagine the advances in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and in the fight against climate change that would be possible with only a fraction of that amount.

It is no coincidence that on his first official foreign visit last week, the new Foreign Minister of Austria, Alexander Schallenberg, chose to come to Geneva, thereby reiterating the long-standing commitment of Austria to multilateralism. On that occasion, the Minister affirmed his commitment to continue the traditional active engagement of Austria in disarmament. Disarmament will continue to be a top priority of Austrian foreign policy and this is underlined in the programme of the new Government.

Austria approaches its 2020 presidency of the Conference with a strong awareness of the responsibility we owe to multilateralism and to disarmament in particular. We hope that the approach of the six Presidents of the session contributes to a constructive atmosphere in the Council Chamber. Over the past months, it has been encouraging to hear from many colleagues in Geneva and New York that there seems to be a broad willingness for the Conference to do better. As one of the six Presidents for 2020, and also as member of the Conference, Austria hopes to build on this momentum. In times like ours, it seems particularly urgent and necessary to make an honest attempt to put the Conference back on track. We owe it to our institution, to our national securities, to our constituencies and, last but not least, to global security.

As mentioned by speakers in this morning's meeting, 2020 will be an important year in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. My delegation is hopeful that it can also be an important year for the Conference if, after a long winter, the Conference can agree to take incremental steps towards finally fulfilling its negotiating mandate. We are under no illusion: in multilateralism, change rarely takes place from one day to the next. We need new ideas and new ways of cooperation. In this regard, Austria wishes to thank the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs for providing the members of the Conference with a gender resource package to facilitate a more diverse approach to our work, while bearing in mind the continued need to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). However, ideas alone will not be enough. We depend on political will and sufficient flexibility from all members of the Conference. The consensus foreseen in our rules of procedure should be a safety net; it should not, however, be used to block incremental steps or discussions before they have even commenced.

With reference to the discussion held in this morning's meeting, we would also like to underline that it is important for the Conference to pursue its work by being transparent and open to the requests of non-member States to participate in its work. We therefore welcome the interest and the support of all those countries which have requested to contribute to our meetings.

As one of the six presidencies this year, Austria is firmly committed to serve the Conference as an honest facilitator. My delegation is looking forward to working with all member States, non-member States and other interested stakeholders to make 2020 a success.

(spoke in French)

Thank you very much.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I thank the representative of Austria for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Italy.

Mr. Incarnato (Italy): Mr. President, thank you for giving me the floor. At the outset, let me congratulate you on assuming your responsibility as the first President of the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Please rest assured of my delegation's full support and cooperation. Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me add some remarks in a national capacity.

The current scenario of heightened international and regional tensions is deeply concerning. Given the situation, we need to remember the special responsibility that we bear in this august body. It is urgent that we act with determination. We need to collectively renew our commitment to preserving international institutions and instruments and guaranteeing their proper functioning, and not to embark on a new arms race. In these times, effective multilateralism and a rules-based international system are the only path to success. For that reason, Italy reiterates its firm commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation as crucial tools for effective long-term results in disarmament and non-proliferation. We remain engaged in promoting these values, especially in the framework of the Conference, whose role as the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body is crucial. We fully understand and share the sense of frustration stemming from the long impasse in the Conference's work, which is regrettable. At the same time, we remain convinced that the Conference is an indispensable and unique body in the tool-box of the disarmament community, even though its potential remains clearly unfulfilled. It is up to us to act to preserve and relaunch its role. In this sense, we commend the cooperation that has been established between the six presidencies of this year. Moreover, we are very much in favour of opting for a more pragmatic approach, as proposed in 2019 by the Netherlands, with substantive work taking place in many important areas of discussion, instead of protracted procedural debates.

Mr. President, Italy reaffirms its firm commitment to disarmament and international security and shares the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons. Our efforts for effective progress on nuclear disarmament are underpinned by our utmost concern about the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons use. In this regard, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with its three mutually reinforcing pillars – non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear technology – remains the cornerstone of the international disarmament regime. In the fiftieth anniversary year of the Treaty's entry into force and with the 2020 Review Conference approaching, the Treaty must be supported, upheld and preserved, especially in today's difficult environment. We therefore invite States that have not yet done so to join the Treaty as non-nuclear-weapon States, without delay and without conditions.

The prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is also one of our key priorities. We call on all States that have not yet done so, particularly the remaining eight annex 2 States, to sign and ratify this Treaty without further delay. We continue to support the immediate commencement of negotiations within the Conference on a treaty dealing with fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Pending the conclusion of such a treaty, we believe that all relevant States should abide by a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. We also support the resumption of substantive discussions on negative security assurances, in the context of a

comprehensive and balanced programme of work, with a view to drawing up recommendations dealing with all aspects of this topic, not excluding an internationally legally binding instrument.

Nuclear-weapon States bear fundamental responsibility for the implementation of article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. While welcoming the reductions made so far, we encourage them to seek further reductions in their nuclear arsenals and to actively engage in strengthening the entire disarmament architecture. In this respect, we particularly encourage the United States and the Russian Federation to seek further reductions to their arsenals, to engage in a constructive dialogue on a post-2021 extension of the New START and on other arms control arrangements and to pursue further discussions on confidence-building, transparency, verification activities and reporting.

Italy values all nuclear disarmament verification initiatives as important tools to build trust and confidence among nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States. In this regard, we support the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and welcome the work of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, my Government remains convinced that preserving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is still in the interest of all as a key pillar of the global non-proliferation architecture and a crucial contribution to regional stability. We are deeply concerned by the latest announcements of Iran and its previous decisions to reduce its commitments under the Plan of Action. We urge Iran to return to full compliance without delay. We are aware of the extremely positive results that we can achieve when diplomacy works.

We also fully support further negotiations between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We regret the current stalemate in that process. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to show actual commitment to diplomatic dialogue and to give concrete proof of its asserted willingness to denuclearize, by refraining from provocations and threats, returning to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and promptly resuming its collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency, including by signing, ratifying and implementing an additional protocol. We believe that international sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must remain in force to sustain the current negotiating process. At the present juncture, it is imperative to remain focused on implementing them. A durable collective commitment remains necessary.

Mr. President, in the light of the increasing tendency to take disarmament negotiations outside the Conference, today more than ever we face the concrete risk of the Conference's marginalization, and ultimately of its irrelevance. At the same time, the deteriorating security environment calls for renewed determination to advance our shared disarmament goals and adds a new sense of urgency to our efforts. To conclude, Italy believes that greater interaction with civil society – broadly encompassing academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector – could make a key contribution to the Conference's work, helping to deepen our technical discussions and substantively enriching our debate. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Italy for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Cervenka (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President, and congratulations on taking up your position as the President of the Conference on Disarmament. Rest assured you have Norway's full support in your endeavour to return the Conference to substantive work.

This will be an important year for international arms control and disarmament. We need a Conference that engages, one way or another, with the substance of its agenda – only that way can it fulfil its mandate. Getting the Conference back to work is our joint responsibility as members. This will require dialogue and willingness to compromise. It may also require some creative thinking and a “why not” attitude on the part of all members, so as not to remain trapped in the stalemate that we have experienced for far too long. Coordination and cooperation from one presidency to the next is something that can only

strengthen the effort to resume substantive work. I would therefore like to thank you for the statement you delivered earlier on behalf of the six Presidents of this session. We are encouraged to see all six Presidents working as a team with a common goal.

Mr. President, Norway had the pleasure to chair the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament, which agreed on a consensus report last year. The First Committee recommended that the General Assembly adopt a resolution encouraging the Conference on Disarmament to address nuclear disarmament verification, including through substantive consideration of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on nuclear disarmament verification. This is but one issue we hope that the Conference will engage with as it endeavours to return to substantive work.

Finally, Mr. President, Norway firmly believes in gender equality and we hope that the Conference will actively take gender considerations into account in all policy areas as we go about our work this year. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Norway for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Iraq.

Mr. Alkhateeb (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Allow me at the outset to congratulate you on assuming the first presidency of the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of the full support of the Republic of Iraq. I trust that your professionalism and wisdom will enable you to successfully assume responsibility for presiding over the Conference. I also wish to commend the other members of the group of six Presidents. We are confident that your fruitful cooperation will afford further proof of the importance of the team of six Presidents and of the joint political will to guarantee a secure and peaceful future.

Mr. President, Iraq attaches great importance to the Conference on Disarmament, just like many other countries throughout the world. It is the sole multilateral forum for negotiating disarmament, but the Conference is unfortunately passing through a critical phase at an extremely complex time. It has been unable for more than two decades to fulfil its negotiating role concerning disarmament treaties owing to the failure to agree on a programme of work. It is therefore imperative to redouble our efforts to produce a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that meets the concerns of all member States and is consistent with the rules of procedure. We wish to underscore the importance of giving top priority to the goal of complete nuclear disarmament. The joint adoption of a programme of work is not in itself the end goal, since we must seek to establish and strengthen a collective and consensual framework to serve as the platform for multilateralism. This would also serve as a confidence-building measure among member States and address their security concerns.

Mr. President, we must assume our historical responsibility and seize the opportunity to resume the Conference's activities in light of the tensions in the current international environment. Otherwise we shall be held liable for the termination of the Conference and its vital role as a negotiating forum in the field of disarmament. We must be prepared under the circumstances to transcend former positions, to consider the interests of humanity as a whole, and to surmount the obstacles that hindered the adoption of proposals submitted in the past.

All member States have an individual and collective responsibility to reach the consensus that has remained pending for two decades. It is not only the responsibility of the presidency but primarily the responsibility of member States. As everyone knows, the crux of the Conference's problem of inactivity and the obstruction of its work during the past two decades has been the weak political will of some member States to eliminate the threat to humanity as a whole stemming from mounting security interests, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the persistence of military dogmas based on the use or threat of their use in order to boost those interests. We are fully aware that the Conference does not operate in a vacuum but in a context related to regional and international security.

Mr. President, Iraq reaffirms its support for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones throughout the world as an important step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. We call on the international community, as an essential line of action in this regard, to implement the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and

Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in accordance with the action plan contained in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference. The failure of international efforts to convene a Middle East conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East constitutes a repudiation of the obligations contained in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference, and will have an adverse impact on the Treaty review process.

In conclusion, Mr. President, it is essential to seize this opportunity to reach a consensus on the programme of work. Many member and observer States share my views in this regard. I wish you and the other Presidents success in your tasks and endeavours aimed at restoring the effectiveness of the Conference and enabling it to play its authentic role in addressing issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

(*spoke in French*)

I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Briceño Salazar (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I wish to begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We have every confidence in your experience and ability to conduct this delicate task. We also welcome the new Permanent Representatives of Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Spain and Switzerland.

Peru is a peace-loving country with a long tradition of promoting disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It is a party to all the international regimes related to the issue, it participates actively in multilateral forums and it supports initiatives that might lead to general and complete disarmament, with priority being given to the prohibition and total elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

As my Government is committed to multilateralism, international law and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, it monitors tense situations in the various regions of the world. Any kind of military escalation would put at risk the lives of millions of people, the global economy, food security and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, we wish to express our concern at the escalation of tensions in the Persian Gulf and call for containment, non-escalation and dialogue in strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations.

In the current international context, the resumption of the work of the Conference is a priority. The deadlock that has paralysed this forum for years is detrimental to international peace and security. The start of this new session is an opportunity to demonstrate the political will needed to galvanize the work of the Conference and send the international community the clear message that States are committed to making progress in negotiating international instruments in the areas of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

My delegation hopes that, this year, frank dialogue will make it possible to bridge our differences in the search for tangible results, beginning with the adoption of a programme of work. In this regard, we agree that a programme of work is no more than a planning tool for plenary meetings. The historical survey conducted by the Netherlands in 2019, set out in the working paper contained in document CD/2165, shows that such was the purpose of the successful programmes of work adopted by the Conference between 1978 and 1992.

We therefore urge all members to show the political will to consider and adopt a programme of work containing only the discussions planned for this year. Such a programme will make it possible to overcome the procedural hurdle that has stood in our way for more than two decades and to clear the way for substantive work on the agenda items. As we move towards that goal, we welcome the collective and cooperative approach taken by the six Presidents in 2020.

Lastly, while reiterating the willingness of Peru to work actively to ensure that the Conference resumes its role as the leading negotiating body, my delegation would like to

draw our colleagues' attention to the gender and disarmament resource pack for multilateral practitioners, a document published by the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group. We believe that the revised version of this document, which was published in January of this year, is an important tool for promoting gender equality in multilateral disarmament forums. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Peru for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I invite the representative of Belgium to take the floor.

Mr. Neijens (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. At this first session of the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to focus on organizational matters. First of all, Mr. President, I would like to wish you every success in your duties as this year begins. I assure you of my delegation's full support. With your appointment, we are starting a new alphabetical cycle that we hope will provide fresh impetus for the rapid resumption of our substantive work. Such a resumption may well be within our grasp if we combine political will with dialogue and cooperation in a spirit of mutual respect. In that regard, my country particularly appreciates the spirit of cooperation and consultation with which you and the six Presidents of the session are opening this session in 2020. Your decision to issue a joint statement by the six Presidents, which is a first for the Conference, and your willingness to adopt an inclusive approach are encouraging signs that are to be welcomed. In this regard, it is regrettable that Turkey has opposed the participation of Cyprus in the work of the Conference.

The Conference plays a key role as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. It is therefore important that it resume without delay its role as the driving force behind the disarmament work that concerns us and that it redouble its efforts to adopt a programme of work this year. My country stands ready to reflect further on the matter with you and the presidencies that succeed yours.

Belgium will have the honour of chairing this august body in January 2021. We will begin preparations for our presidency this year, in collaboration with the current group of six Presidents, whose work we are already following with great interest at the meetings of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, the last President of the 2019 session and the first President of the 2021 session, which you have kindly initiated. Next week, after hearing the comments of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, my Ambassador will delve further into issues of substance. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Belgium for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I invite the representative of Bulgaria to take the floor.

Mr. Tomov (Bulgaria): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to congratulate you on assuming your functions and wholeheartedly to wish you the utmost success in discharging your duties.

The Republic of Bulgaria is very much encouraged by the new approach of the six presidencies of the Conference on Disarmament this year. It was undoubtedly high time for new approaches in the Conference's work. After all, as one ambassador said last year upon commencing his duties as President, we can proceed only together.

We are hopeful that this new approach will boost our work in tackling all the topics discussed in 2019, including working methods and expansion. We also hope for a continuation of the work done in the subsidiary bodies in 2018 in one form or another, since we consider dialogue to be the best tool towards understanding and building shared approaches to commonly encountered security issues.

We would support steps towards commencing negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, since we consider that much of the preparatory work has been done already. The positive political and security implications of such a step would be immense, including with regard to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review process. It would also be a very positive sign for the outside world that the Conference is aware of its responsibility and is capable of bearing it.

Beyond nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues, we should bear in mind that it is our shared responsibility to keep pace with new technological developments. In that regard, special attention should be devoted to threats related to space security, cybersecurity and biosecurity.

We wish you and your colleagues every success in delivering the progress that this sound body needs in order to fulfil its negotiating mandate. I thank you for your attention.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Bulgaria for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, to which I would like to add a few remarks in a national capacity. Allow me to begin, as is fitting, by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of this important body and by wishing you every success. You can count on the full support of France throughout your presidency and be sure that my team is entirely at your disposal for any help you may need. I would like to welcome our new colleagues. My delegation wishes them every success in the accomplishment of their mission.

Mr. President, you have prepared for your presidency in the best possible way – namely, by conducting an intensive consultation process and organizing meetings of the six Presidents of this session and meetings of those six Presidents, the last President of the 2019 session and the first President of the 2021 session. My delegation supports any initiative aimed at ensuring greater continuity and more effective governance of the Conference on Disarmament over time. The unity of the six Presidents will benefit the Conference as a whole by opening the way to increased cooperation. It is with interest and the necessary open-mindedness that we will study the joint paper issued by the six Presidents, which should lay the groundwork for the Conference's work in 2020. France supports the efforts to ensure that the Conference resumes one of the key elements of its original mandate, which is the negotiation of multilateral disarmament treaties.

As you know, France is actively promoting the immediate initiation of the negotiation, in the Conference, of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons on the basis of the mandate set out in document CD/1299. This is unquestionably the most ripe subject for negotiations and would contribute to advancing nuclear disarmament by limiting the quantitative production of nuclear weapons. While we await the start of negotiations, France supports the stepping up of technical discussions on the nature of such a treaty. More generally, it is necessary for the Conference to re-establish a climate of trust and constructive dialogue that will enable progress to be made on the basis of the developments and achievements of recent years.

As this year begins, we are going through a particularly tumultuous period for international peace and security, which reminds us of the importance of forums such as the Conference. The world cannot afford to engage in a new arms race. It is essential to support and strengthen disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control processes, taking into account the deterioration of the security environment and the need to recreate it. It is our collective responsibility to make the most of these forums to ensure that we benefit from them as much as possible. If we are to be realistic, then we must explore practical solutions, such as continuing the work of subsidiary bodies in parallel with developing a programme of work. The work carried out within this framework in 2018 enabled substantial and very encouraging progress to be made. It would be completely untrue to say that the Conference does not do any work. The fact that no negotiations are taking place does not mean that we are doing nothing. We must continue our strategic dialogue and strengthen our technical discussions in order to create the conditions in which instruments that promote our common security may be negotiated. This very morning, the new Ambassador of Japan said that his country was interested in the discussions that took place last year on nuclear deterrence and transparency. I believe that he is absolutely right, and my country stands ready to pursue such discussions this year and in the years to come. This morning, my German colleague outlined all the efforts that our two countries are making to advance the cause of disarmament and make progress in the verification of nuclear weapons and lethal autonomous weapon systems. All this work needs to be pursued in a creative spirit, as that is the spirit that will enable us to make progress.

I will now focus on a key event in our calendar for 2020, the 2020 Review Conference, and on a major proliferation issue, the future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which my country is deeply committed to maintaining. Very briefly, the 2020 Review Conference must be an opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering support for the preservation and strengthening of this key instrument for the non-proliferation regime in a context where the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery has increased in recent months and years. As we prepare to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty, we must remember the contribution that its three pillars have made to our collective security.

With regard to Iran, the various stages of its disengagement from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action have serious consequences for proliferation. As the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Germany, the United Kingdom and France announced on 14 January, and I quote, “we have therefore been left with no choice, given Iran’s actions, but to register today our concerns that Iran is not meeting its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and to refer this matter to the Joint Commission under the Dispute Resolution Mechanism, as set out in paragraph 36 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”. The three Ministers added, and I quote again, as this is important:

We do this in good faith with the overarching objective of preserving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and in the sincere hope of finding a way forward to resolve the impasse through constructive diplomatic dialogue, while preserving the agreement and remaining within its framework. In doing so, our three countries are not joining a campaign to implement maximum pressure against Iran. Our hope is to bring Iran back into full compliance with its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I wish you and the forthcoming Presidents every success in your joint efforts. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of France for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela aligns itself with the statement made by the delegation of Cuba on behalf of the Group of 21. Through you, Mr. President, we welcome Ambassador Lazhar Soualem, Director-General for Multilateral Relations of Algeria, who delivered an interesting message on behalf of his country’s Minister for Foreign Affairs this morning. We congratulate Ambassador Rachid Belbaki of Algeria on his assumption of the presidency of this forum. We would like to express our support for his work and all his endeavours in the coming weeks and to assure him of our cooperation. We look forward to a fruitful and substantive session of the Conference on Disarmament this year.

My country attaches great importance to the work of the Conference, considering it to be the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament and an integral and vital part of the disarmament machinery, which must be preserved and strengthened. This is a landmark year for the diplomatic community in Geneva and for the Conference. It is 100 years since Geneva was chosen as the headquarters of the League of Nations and the birth of multilateral diplomacy as we know it. It is also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and 50 years since the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This is a key opportunity for taking action and showing the world that substantive progress has been made in the areas of cooperation, disarmament, peace and security.

As we embark on a new 10-year cycle, the member States of the Conference, and in particular the Algerian presidency, have a unique opportunity to establish a constructive and cooperative atmosphere that will enable the Conference to overcome the deadlock. We warmly welcome the distinguished ambassadors and delegations of all the member States of the Conference and wish them every success in the new year. We call on all member States, without exception, to fulfil the mandate of the Conference and adopt a balanced and comprehensive programme of work for 2020 that takes disarmament-related priorities into account.

In line with the statement of the Group of 21, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela acknowledges the need to pay attention to the security interests of all States and to address nuclear disarmament in accordance with the rules of procedure, including the rule of consensus. The future and relevance of the Conference depend on a genuine demonstration by member States that they have the political will to make substantive commitments. Our country therefore confirms its willingness to immediately begin negotiations on the items on the Conference agenda.

We are convinced that multilateralism is the best tool for promoting the work of the Conference and that standards and agreements adopted multilaterally, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, constitute the only truly effective and sustainable way of addressing disarmament and international security issues. Venezuela assumes its part of the collective responsibility to promote international peace and security. Through its diplomacy of peace, based on Bolivarian ideals, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela advocates the construction of a multipolar international system oriented towards peace, justice, development and full respect for the rules and principles of international law.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation would like to join others in congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of our full cooperation, as has always been the case in this forum.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, the ever-increasing deterioration of the global security environment has made the Conference and its mandate more relevant than ever. The worsening security climate should not be invoked as an excuse to further exacerbate the arms race or to unravel existing arms treaties. Rather, it should serve as an urgent motivation to expedite disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament.

As the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, the Conference is best placed to move the international community forward in its long quest for a world free from nuclear weapons. We recognize the important task ahead of us and the important responsibility entrusted to the Conference's first presidency of 2020. We appreciate that you have already conducted extensive consultations with member States with a view to crafting a balanced and comprehensive programme of work, and I would like to reiterate the importance of a balanced and inclusive programme which appropriately addresses the Conference's core mandates – namely, nuclear disarmament, effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. My delegation remains committed to engaging with you and with other responsible delegations to fulfil that goal. We should be mindful of the lessons learned in 2019, both here in Geneva and in the Third Committee in New York, so as to avoid petty politics, maintain our focus on the core agenda and prevent this forum from being dragged down by unnecessary, ill-intended distractions.

Commencing negotiations on nuclear disarmament is the most urgent task that the Conference faces. The prevailing security challenges to international peace and security should compel us all to prioritize nuclear disarmament as the most urgent security concern, since nuclear weapons continue to pose an existential threat to humanity, while non-compliance with nuclear disarmament obligations has seriously undermined the space, the relevance and the capacity of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to realize its main purpose, which is nuclear disarmament.

There is no alternative to multilateral diplomacy and collective interaction for addressing our common concern. We must shield multilateralism and multilateral institutions against the evil of unilateralism. This is the only way to protect the international rule of law, ensure that it flourishes and break the stalemate in the Conference.

Mr. President, some colleagues expressed their concern over the increasing tensions in the Persian Gulf area and in the broader West Asian region. I trust that everyone is deeply concerned and at the same time aware of the underlying source of this increasing

tension. The first days of 2020 coincided with a harrowing blow to peace and security, and indeed to the most basic tenets of human civility, when on 3 January the most effective force against the menace of ISIS terrorism fell victim to an outrageous act of overt State terrorism. The cowardly act, perpetrated in grave violation of international law and in brazen defiance of universally respected norms and standards, put the whole region on alert and sounded the alarm over the consequences of excessively egoistic militarism and hawkish unilateralism. The Islamic Republic of Iran reacted responsibly and in full accordance with international law by taking certain measures in exercise of its inherent right to self-defence.

Iran continues to stand resolute in defence of its sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity. The United States shall bear full responsibility for its unprecedented, interventionist and aggressive acts and policies against Iran and other nations in the region. General Soleimani and his four companions will always remain in the hearts and minds of Iranians, who poured into the streets in their tens of millions to pay tribute to him for his heroic sacrifices during the eight-year war with Saddam's regime and in the fight against the scourge of Daesh. The assassination should serve as another wake-up call that the United States' military presence in West Asia has only brought violence, chaos, division, hatred and terror; and that it is the major source of instability and insecurity in the region.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, the gravity, unlawfulness and immorality of the atrocity, ordered and carried out in the name of a sovereign State against an official of another sovereign nation while on an official visit to an independent neighbouring country, must compel us to overcome our normalcy bias or dare to accept the banalization of evil.

I would also like to touch very briefly on the points raised by certain delegations about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, with the proviso that the voluntary commitments accepted by Iran under the Plan have nothing to do with non-proliferation. Iran was among the first signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and our nuclear programme has always been peaceful. In recent years it has remained under the unprecedented scrutiny of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

This morning, the representative of the European Union expressed "regret" – the usual catchphrase – over the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the Plan of Action and "deep concern" over the latest remedial measures taken by Iran on 5 January after several months of one-sided implementation of the agreement and following the passivity of France, Germany and the United Kingdom (EU3) in the face of the United States' intransigence. The tone itself tells a lot. You continue only to "regret" a blatant violation of a multilaterally negotiated diplomatic achievement and the brazen defiance of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015). That has proved, unfortunately, not to be enough. We assumed the EU3 to be credible negotiating partners during the long period of negotiations which led to the Plan of Action, and we have always prayed for that credibility to be sustained before the watching eyes of the international community. The Plan of Action was crafted as a confidence-building measure to alleviate any concerns, real or concocted, over the nature of our programme. It worked well, mainly thanks to the impeccable performance of Iran, which has been confirmed more than 17 times by IAEA. It is a multilateral document that was negotiated between Iran and the EU3 plus China, the Russian Federation and the United States of America and endorsed by a Security Council resolution adopted by consensus.

The United States' unilateral and unlawful decision in May 2018 to withdraw from the deal badly damaged the whole agreement. We should not lose sight of the crystal-clear fact that it was one of the six countries with which Iran negotiated, not Iran, that reneged on its obligations and triggered a very consequential chain of events that led to this worrying situation. And despite the United States' reckless unilateral withdrawal, Iran continued to fully implement its obligations, voluntarily undertaken under the Plan of Action, in the hope that other partners would rush to compensate for the damage inflicted upon the agreement. Unfortunately, that expectation proved far from realistic, as our partners preferred to appease the United States, in vain. Iran continued, almost entirely on its own, to implement its voluntary obligations for more than 16 months as the United States' so-called maximum pressure campaign reimposed all United States sanctions and scared all EU3 economic operators away from Iran.

The EU3 only watched as the United States' unlawful and malign campaign crossed all red lines by imposing sanctions on almost every sector of the Iranian economy with the

deliberate aim of starving the Iranian nation and depriving its people of their right to life and their right to health. Under such circumstances, Iran resorted to paragraphs 26 and 36 of the Plan of Action in order to remedy the imbalance caused by the United States' withdrawal and, unfortunately, by others' lack of activity in terms of implementing their obligations.

The recent measures taken by Iran are completely within the framework of the Plan of Action, as we are insightful enough not to waste the most important achievement of multilateral diplomacy of the past two decades. Iran continues its cooperation with IAEA and its voluntary implementation of the additional protocol. Steps taken by Iran in full conformity with the Plan of Action will be reversible, should other Plan participants take a meaningful decision to live up to their commitments. Otherwise, Iran will be unable to shoulder the heavy weight of sustaining a multilateral agreement – in fact a Security Council resolution – alone.

Dear colleagues, you cannot have it both ways. The rule of law and respect for multilateral obligations are not a ritual to be taken for granted. They require a minimum level of readiness to pay for the cost. We cannot gain credibility at the expense of others. You cannot urge Iran to return to full compliance with its obligations before you decide to comply with your own obligations, whose implementation in the past one and a half years, unfortunately, has been far from complete. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo Miño (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We have every confidence that your experience and diplomatic skills will enable you to effectively carry out the delicate task that you are taking on today, in respect of which my delegation assures you of its commitment and support.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and warmly welcome the new representatives to the Conference – that is, the Permanent Representatives of Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Spain and Switzerland.

No one can deny that these are particularly troubling times. On the one hand, there is a lack of political will to reach even the consensus that would allow us to begin to consider substantive disarmament issues. On the other hand, the failure of the commitments already made puts all humanity at serious risk of an uncontrolled escalation of an arms race with terrible consequences, a scenario that might include new nuclear tests and the appearance of new, improved and more lethal weapons.

Some people are already warning that an arms build-up might easily take place and that small incidents may lead to local regional conflicts and, further down the line, a nuclear confrontation. Although many such fears have been voiced in the past, we are now facing, as stated in so many forums, a serious threat of nuclear war, in which we will all lose out. If we have the chance to talk about it, of course.

It would seem that the structure of nuclear arms control and progressive disarmament may have begun to collapse and that new threats, subject to no controls, are emerging. To take an optimistic view, we hope that panic over the possibility of nuclear war will eventually force the parties concerned into negotiations. However, the events that took place at the beginning of this year do not exactly bode well.

Soon, the figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute on the thousands of nuclear warheads that are or will be possessed by nuclear-weapon States and States aspiring to possess nuclear weapons could become a mere curiosity, as we appear to be entering a free-for-all. This issue is obviously linked to the notion of transparency.

Many stakeholders have also remarked that multilateralism is in a crisis characterized by the breakdown of the system. Thus, issues that have been the subject of long and difficult negotiations over decades are being left to one side. This creates insecurities in the multilateral system. The structure of the weapons system is one of the greatest concerns because the destruction of humanity really is possible. Long-standing

treaties are being denounced and negotiations are failing to get off the ground, leading to another kind of war in the form of an arms race and technological warfare.

Countries like Ecuador, which seek not to consolidate military power or dominate other States but only to promote sustainable human development, are astonished by attitudes that reveal a hunger for domination and power, in pursuit of which hundreds of billions of dollars are invested annually with the sole purpose of perfecting and accumulating increasingly powerful and sophisticated weapons of mass destruction. It is very obvious that these immense resources, or a small part of them, could be better invested in alleviating poverty and reducing levels of migration and inequality. This would really make a big difference.

In this regard, my delegation reiterates the unwavering commitment of Ecuador, which is convinced that dialogue and negotiation are the best ways of ensuring that international relations give rise to cooperation and peace, to fulfilling the obligations set forth in international disarmament instruments.

My country has endeavoured to promote multilateralism as the main means of guaranteeing global peace and security and therefore as the basic mechanism for promoting disarmament and non-proliferation and seeking an effective international agreement to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of this type of weapon.

As a defender and promoter of international law, international humanitarian law and the peaceful settlement of disputes, Ecuador supports all actions aimed at preventing the emergence of conflicts and backs international instruments conducive to the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It is also opposed to arms races of all kinds, wherever and whenever they may occur.

The international community knows that Ecuador has played a leading role in all general and complete disarmament processes. To mention just one of them, it played a part in developing nuclear-weapon-free zones during the formulation and consolidation of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. It also chaired the working group at the Disarmament Commission in 1999, which adopted by consensus a series of principles and guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Consequently, Ecuador reiterates its commitment to dialogue and negotiation in order to strengthen the global denuclearization regime, which entails banning nuclear testing and totally eliminating nuclear weapons.

In the light of the current geopolitical situation, we insist on the international community's moral duty to obtain assurances concerning the non-use of nuclear weapons and to deal responsibly with the associated risks. We also recall that the Conference has an inescapable responsibility to negotiate legally binding instruments that prioritize nuclear disarmament above all else.

I would like to end on a positive note by expressing the wish that the spirit of global peace will be renewed in 2020 and throughout the new decade by achieving positive results at the Review Conference and overcoming the deadlock in which the Conference on Disarmament has been mired in recent decades. This will enable us to resume substantive negotiation work.

We call on all parties to the Conference to work towards this goal by demonstrating genuine political will, flexibility and a strong desire to end mistrust. In that regard, Mr. President, you can be sure of our delegation's unwavering commitment and full support. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of Ecuador for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cleobury (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me first to congratulate Algeria and you personally on your assumption of the first presidency of the 2020 session. I would like to extend a warm welcome to you and to all our other new colleagues who are taking up their functions in Geneva.

The state of geopolitics remains as challenging as it was last year, but the new year brings new optimism, and we hope that you can guide us on a path to making progress this year.

It will be another important year for disarmament and arms control. Above all, of course, this year is a significant one for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. For the past 50 years, the Treaty has provided the framework for the extension of the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, for the minimization of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and for significant nuclear disarmament. At the 2020 Review Conference in April and May, we will celebrate this achievement and reaffirm our commitment to the Treaty in all its aspects. While States parties to the Treaty can plot a course to a world without nuclear weapons, it is the Conference on Disarmament which is charged with negotiating the instruments that will turn that aspiration into reality. As such, perhaps the greatest contribution this Conference can make to the success of the Review Conference is to show that it is ready to fulfil that responsibility.

Mr. President, my delegation remains ready to engage in substantive discussions on all agenda items. In particular, we continue to believe that there is no impediment to the immediate commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, and that all outstanding issues can be resolved during the course of negotiations. We also believe that the Conference on Disarmament can contribute materially to efforts to reduce risks and threats to operations in outer space. Our aim should be to establish a clear and common understanding of what constitutes responsible behaviour in space, including a set of norms that would allow for better communication around space operations.

There will be ample time in the coming session to expand on these points and others. But we will only use that time productively if we can agree on an appropriate way of organizing it. My delegation would support the creation of subsidiary bodies to work towards negotiating mandates on the core issues, as in 2018 and as we proposed in our presidency last year. We are also open to consultations on updating the Conference's working methods and on enlarging its membership, noting that we can only move forward on either of these questions, as on any others, by consensus, respecting the core interests of each and every member State.

My delegation regrets the decision by Turkey to block the application of Cyprus to participate as an observer in the work of the Conference and sincerely hopes that it will reconsider.

Let us begin at the beginning, though, as our rules of procedure demand, by quickly agreeing on an overarching programme of work: a simple planning tool that allocates time to each of our agenda items, which would allow us to use the time allocated to us this year to discuss the important substantive issues on our agenda rather than process and procedure. This year, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, let us show that the multilateral disarmament system is ready to undertake the role that the world has entrusted to it.

Mr. President, my delegation looks forward to a productive session under your expert leadership and that of the rest of the presidencies of this session. We wish you, and all of us, every success. I thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. I am taking the floor to exercise my right of reply to some comments that were made during this morning's meeting and earlier this afternoon.

First, let me turn to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. My Government – and my President in particular – took a very serious and significant risk to have a direct dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the highest level. My President and my Government remain committed to implementing the agreement that was reached in 2018 at the summit in Singapore. We remain hopeful that North Korea will make the right decision, both for the world and for the North Korean people. We have been very frank. The weapons systems that North Korea possesses are a real risk to our security and the security of others. America does not pose a security risk to the North Koreans. We want a

bright future for them, as my President has outlined to Chairman Kim. We can have serious conversations about how we implement the statement that was signed in 2018. My hope is that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will return to the table so that we can move forward on implementing that statement with regard to denuclearization. I have to say that my delegation is slightly concerned by the statement made earlier by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in which he said that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea no longer found reason to be unilaterally bound by the agreement. My hope is that he was not specifically referring to the statement that was issued by President Trump and Chairman Kim. Maybe some further clarification would be in order. Again, we remain willing and able to come to the table and work out how we can implement denuclearization, and as I said earlier, we hope that the North will do that.

Since 1979, Iran has made it a policy to actively direct, facilitate and carry out terrorist activity globally. Unlike almost any other country, the Islamic Republic has supported terrorism with its own military and intelligence apparatus: the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, formerly headed by Qasem Soleimani; the Ministry of Intelligence and Security; and proxy forces throughout the region. Today, the Quds Force is active across the Middle East and has plotted or carried out terrorist attacks in five continents. Where it is unable or unwilling to act directly, the Iranian regime has mastered the use of terrorist proxy groups, such as Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Ashtar Brigades in Bahrain, and Kata'ib Hizbullah in Iraq, to conduct terrorist attacks.

Since 2012, Iran has spent over \$16 billion propping up regimes and supporting proxies throughout the region. In recent months, Iran has seized ships in international waters, launched an unprovoked strike on Saudi Arabia, shot down two United States drones and, most recently, staged an attack on the United States Embassy in Baghdad. In November 2019, the regime killed 1,500 of its own people who were protesting in more than 100 cities across Iran. Increased revenues under the nuclear deal could have helped improve the lives of the Iranian people – the regime's longest suffering victims. Instead, terrorist dictators, proxy militias and the regime's cronies benefited the most. United States sanctions are intended to cut off the revenues the Iranian regime uses to fund terror around the world, foment global instability, fund its nuclear programme and line its corrupt leaders' pockets.

The United States' goal is to apply maximum pressure on the Iranian regime so that it will change its behaviour and return to the negotiating table as quickly as possible. The United States' maximum pressure campaign is built on economic pressure, diplomatic isolation and credible military deterrence. The United States has denied the Iranian regime funds used to finance terror and pursue nuclear weapons. The President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, said that United States sanctions have cost Iran \$200 billion in foreign exchange income and investment, including \$100 billion in oil revenue and an equal amount in foreign investment credit. The United States is targeting the sources of export revenue that may be used by the Iranian regime to fund and support its nuclear programme, missile development, terrorism, terrorist proxy networks and malign regional influence. In January 2020, President Trump issued an executive order authorizing the imposition of sanctions against any person operating in, trading with or assisting additional sectors of the Iranian economy, including construction, manufacturing, textiles and mining. The United States and its allies have made it clear that the Iranian regime must change its behaviour and act like a normal nation or risk continued diplomatic isolation from the rest of the world. We welcome the step taken by the European Union to activate the dispute resolution mechanism to counter the Iranian regime's non-compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. We believe that the Plan of Action, as we have said many times, is a flawed deal from which the United States withdrew to deny the Iranian regime the revenue it needs to finance terror and pursue nuclear weapons.

Finally, President Trump gave the order to eliminate the terrorist Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Soleimani was the chief terrorist of the world's leading State sponsor of terror: the Iranian regime. He was responsible for the deaths of at least 603 United States service members in Iraq from 2003 to 2011 and for thousands of other deaths across the region, as well as the 31 December 2019 attack on the United States Embassy in Baghdad. The killing of Qasem Soleimani saved American lives and the lives of many innocent people in the region. Soleimani's hands were drenched in American and Iranian blood, as he was also the mastermind behind

the brutal crackdown of November 2019 which, as I said earlier, left over 1,500 Iranian protesters dead.

The world is a safer and much better place without Soleimani and his terror campaign. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Although I have been in Geneva for several months now, and many of you have seen a great deal of me, this is the first time that I have formally participated in the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me therefore to congratulate you on assuming the presidency and to wish you every success. I would particularly like to mention the coordination work that you have undertaken with the six Presidents of this year's session and with that group of Presidents plus the last President of the 2019 session and the first President of the 2021 session.

I would like to thank the secretariat for its work, which has always been fundamental to our endeavours, and to express my appreciation for its efforts to make documents available and to follow up on our statements. I am at your disposal to work for the best results. I hope to be able to bring some creativity to our work so that we might overcome the stalemate hampering our discussions and establish a programme of work that allows us to address the substantive aspects of the issues at stake.

My mandate as Ambassador is to negotiate multilateral disarmament agreements, not to engage in endless debate on working methods. I endorse the statements made in this chamber by the European Union today and will endorse all statements that it makes in the future. For this reason, I call on Turkey to reconsider its decision to exclude Cyprus from our work.

Today we have heard our colleagues use fine words and express good intentions. Although it is difficult to begin optimistically after so many years of frustration and stalemate, the good will that everyone has shown, the professionalism with which the six Presidents have approached the scheduling of their duties, and the consistent coordination and openness that we have displayed in considering our expectations suggest that another path is possible.

As I have said, our mandate as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament is to negotiate. But here it seems that we negotiate only disagreements, complaints and procedures. Although we sometimes talk about substantive issues, it is only with difficulty that we allow them to have any impact on our efforts to break fresh ground in the area of disarmament. We must return to our mandate. We must show the world some evidence that the time we spend here is useful. The organization of our work is important, but it has long been held hostage to other interests. We must overcome this impasse, which is rooted in closed concepts, and open ourselves up to greater creativity. Anything allowed by the rules of procedure is worth considering. On the table is a proposal put forward by the Netherlands last year that our delegation supports and finds interesting. The new ideas expressed today may also help us to work more flexibly.

We have to be more pragmatic and open if we really want to achieve anything. We cannot start every session every year talking about the same thing only to fail to reach an agreement, unless that is precisely the intention, which would be embarrassing. One demand is repeatedly made – that is, that we start work now on negotiating a fissile material cut-off treaty, known to us all as the FMCT. People in this chamber, responding to what has been a priority of ours for years, have brought together elements on which a consensus can be built, elements that we all believe to be suitable for a treaty that we consider necessary. In all respects – including in regard to scope, definitions and verification – a significant amount of technical work has been carried out and consolidated by official documents and the high-level preparatory group.

My delegation believes that we should start these negotiations as soon as possible. For as long as we fail to make progress, for as long as we continue to get bogged down, other options will have to be given priority. However, those options are no substitute for our very important and much-derided task, which is to negotiate. I am referring, for

example, to discussions on nuclear risk reduction that allow progress to be made in many areas but are no more than a palliative remedy for our failings.

The Review Conference, a conference of utmost importance, is due to take place this year. Let us set an example of optimism with our work, let us take a step forward, let us justify our time and presence here by achieving results, as a matter of urgency. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of Spain for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, my delegation wishes to align itself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Cuba this morning on behalf of the Group of 21. I also wish at the outset to congratulate you, Ambassador Rachid Belbaki, on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We assure you of our full support and willingness to cooperate with your endeavours to ensure the successful outcome of the Conference.

Your assumption of the first presidency of the Conference entails exceptional responsibility to work towards building a consensus on a programme of work that signals the way forward during the current session. Given the great legacy of your country, Algeria, in the field of disarmament and your personal skills, we are confident that you will spare no effort to achieve consensus and to free the Conference from excessive politicization and the negative atmosphere that has prevailed in its deliberations, especially during the past few years. We listened with interest to the proposals made during the opening meeting, which focused on the adoption of a new, flexible and realistic approach so that the Conference can emerge from its stalemate and stagnation. We look forward to discussing the plan of action that you intend to present, but we also wish to underscore the pre-eminence of the principle of inclusiveness and balance in implementing the Conference's negotiating mandate. We are naturally aware that the Conference does not operate in a vacuum, but the experience of recent years has demonstrated that the failure of the Conference is the result of lack of political will and excessive politicization stemming from the prevailing international security environment and its complexities, not any other factor. I repeat: it is not the result of any other factor.

The challenges facing the world today, the escalation in the unilateral use or threat of the use of force in international relations and wanton breaches of international law call for a basic review this year, which marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations, of the role of multilateral diplomacy, and the obligation to respect the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. In view of the increasing non-compliance with treaty obligations related to the prevention and control of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the escalating risks of militarization, the launching of an arms race in outer space and the increased risk of terrorist groups obtaining and using weapons of mass destruction, it is of vital importance to reactivate the Conference on Disarmament and to restore its role and negotiating mandate. In this context, Syria expresses its support for the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work for the Conference with a negotiating mandate that includes the four core agenda items and other items, and renews its support for the launching of negotiations in the Conference on a draft international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism based on the text proposed by the Russian Federation.

Mr. President, while acknowledging the existing negative indicators, the Syrian Arab Republic hopes that the tenth Review Conference, which coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, will provide an opportunity to achieve an effective and genuine consensus on action to implement the undertakings and obligations set out in the Treaty, especially article VI concerning nuclear disarmament. In view of the dangers that threaten humankind as a result of the existence and possible use of nuclear weapons, top priority should be given to the elimination of such weapons, and non-proliferation efforts should be accompanied by action to promote nuclear disarmament.

Syria underscores the need for negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament, in the context of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work, on the drafting of an internationally binding fissile material cut-off treaty as an effective contribution to nuclear

disarmament. The treaty should provide for the verifiable destruction of fissile material stockpiles and prohibit the production of new material. Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, there is an urgent need to provide non-nuclear-weapon States with effective, universal, unconditional, non-discriminatory and legally binding security assurances. High priority must also be given to maintenance of the peaceful use of outer space and prevention of its militarization.

Motivated by its conviction that the establishment of regional nuclear-weapon-free zones constitutes a positive step and an effective contribution to achievement of the goals of non-proliferation and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, my country, Syria, participated actively in the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, which was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in November last year. It expressed its willingness during the Conference to take vigorous action towards reaching an agreement on the establishment of such a zone. However, the absence of Israel, the only party in the region that has not acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and refuses to place its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the absence of the United States, the depositary of the Treaty, nullified all prospects afforded by the Conference of achieving the goal of a weapon-free zone. It demonstrated the lack of credibility of claims concerning nuclear non-proliferation, and the continued unwillingness to implement the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference. This will have an adverse impact on the next Review Conference.

In conclusion, Mr. President, while we are fully aware of the complex nature of the issues that fall within the competence of the Conference on Disarmament and the broad spectrum of views to which they give rise under the current international circumstances, the Syrian Arab Republic hopes that this year's session will achieve advances in the work of the Conference. It is convinced that the Conference's ability to gradually emerge from its state of stagnation and deadlock will depend to a large extent on compliance with the rules of procedure of the Conference, avoidance of excessive politicization of its deliberations and respect for the Conference's mandate, role and agenda. It will also require a genuine political will to ensure that serious discussions are conducted on agenda-related issues and that sterile debates falling outside the mandate and agenda of the Conference are avoided. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

(*spoke in French*)

I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Ağacikoğlu (Turkey): Thank you, Mr. President. We believe that most of the delegates to this distinguished body will recall the opening meeting of 2019 and the procedure we followed for accepting the participation of non-member States. In that meeting, Turkey registered its position vis-à-vis the process, notably the evident departure of the Conference on Disarmament from its established common practice on the approval of observer States, and reserved its right for future cases. This is duly reflected in document CD/PV.1475.

I will not go into the details of the position of Turkey regarding the Cyprus matter, which is clear, principled and duly reflected in documents CD/1438 and CD/1738. However, I would like to underline that it is surprising to see interventions on this matter today from delegations which were silent in a similar situation last year when Palestine requested to participate as an observer State but was blocked by a few delegations. I will leave it at that, Mr. President. Turkey will gladly provide further information to interested delegations. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Turkey for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me quickly respond to the remarks by the representative of the United States. Since the adoption of the joint statement two years ago, the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea has seen nothing but betrayal from the United States, which has failed to reciprocate our initial steps and has shown no willingness to honour its commitment, instead increasing pressure, sanctions and military structures. Thus, we have been deceived by the United States and caught in a dialogue for more than a year and a half.

We feel no necessity, therefore, to return to talks in which one side makes unilateral demands of the other. We hold no expectations that the United States will lift sanctions; nor do we pin our hopes on a so-called bright future with the help of the United States. We know well the path that we have to take. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I know it is not really worth taking the time of this august body to respond to certain allegations repeated by the representative of the United States. We are not new to these absurd allegations and pathetic lies. However, we may rest assured that this sadistic rhetoric cannot bring credibility back to an Administration that is famous for lies, bullying and inhumane coercive measures against other countries in all four corners of the world.

Dear colleagues, it is eye-opening that the representative of the United States of America announced here, loud and clear, that his country ordered the unlawful assassination of the military official of another country. Clandestine activities, covert assassinations, sabotage and coups d'état have been part of the United States' behaviour for the past century. In 1953 Iran was one of the victims when our national Government fell victim to such a coup d'état. But acting in an overt manner and taking pride in killing the official of a sovereign State is, I think, unprecedented.

When representatives of the United States talk about the Iranian people, I wonder why are they are blind to the millions of people who poured into the streets to pay tribute to someone who is labelled a terrorist. The people of Iran paid tribute to the martyr General Soleimani and his companions in the second biggest funeral procession in the history of Iran. Everyone knows now that General Soleimani and his colleagues were perhaps sinful in terms of dismantling the reign of terror imposed by Daesh, but Daesh is an animal that was created by the United States. Those are not my words, but those of the President of the United States when he accused previous Administrations of creating Daesh in our region. If that is the case, then I think General Soleimani and Iran can happily take pride in helping the Iraqi and Syrian people and other people in the region to get rid of the scourge of Daesh and other extremist terrorists.

Mr. President, dear colleagues, our people have shown that the martyr Qasem Soleimani will remain a hero. Yes, you killed a hero, but you gave us a legend who will remain a source of inspiration and aspiration for resistance, resilience and the fight against injustice. It is no surprise that the United States continues to call him a terrorist. That is what they call adding insult to injury, which is what psychopaths do. The Iranian people will forget neither the criminal act nor the insult against their hero.

Again, the United States representative takes pride in the maximum pressure campaign, which he says is to force Iran to the negotiating table. The negotiating table with whom? We already negotiated, for a long time, to reach the comprehensive deal which is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was endorsed by the Security Council by consensus. Now you see the fate of that deal. Are you suggesting that Iran would be so naive as to repeat the same mistake? The purpose of the maximum pressure campaign is not to bother the Government of Iran economically; it is economic terrorism. It is an economic war, deliberately aimed at starving the Iranian nation and killing innocent children who are in need of medicine and medical care. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran and now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President, I apologize for having to take the floor once more. Soleimani was a terrorist, plain and simple. The Iranian representative can paint any other kind of picture he wants. The reality is that Soleimani had a great deal of blood on his hands and he was held to account. The United States is now restoring deterrence in the region. Over the years, my Government has shown great restraint

concerning attacks on Americans in the Middle East. My hope is that Iran has received the message we have sent. We will see. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? This does not appear to be the case. I have no more speakers on my list.

Before concluding, I would like to share with you, on behalf of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, a document on the work of the Conference on Disarmament entitled “Background”, which will be circulated or emailed to you very soon. We are not going to hold any more plenary meetings this week. We are going to devote the time that we have to consultations with member countries and regional groups. The next plenary meeting will take place on Tuesday, 28 January, at 10 a.m. The secretariat will send you the invitation to this meeting by email. That concludes our business for this afternoon. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.