

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and thirty-sixth plenary meeting


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 27 February 2020, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Carlos Mario Foradori (Argentina)

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The President: I call to order the 1536th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today's meeting will be devoted to considering the package circulated by the secretariat on Monday, 24 February 2020 in the document CD/WP.626/Rev.2. Yesterday, some delegations made requests to exercise their right of reply during the plenary meeting today. I intend to give the floor to these delegations once we have considered the package.

I have consulted with most of you, as did my predecessor, Ambassador Belbaki of Algeria, who I again thank for his commendable work towards enabling the Conference to resume structured substantive work at its 2020 session. In accordance with rules 28 and 29 of the rules of procedure, the Conference has the obligation to establish a programme of work and the President has the responsibility to present it. For more than 20 years, we were unable to achieve this. Now we have another chance to do so. If we do not take it, we must assume the consequences that this may have for the future of this body.

During the Algerian presidency, we were very close to achieving consensus, thanks to the ability of the Ambassador Belbaki. But in the end, it was not possible because some delegations still had some reservations.

Since day one of my term, I have organized several meetings in different formats. As I mentioned last Friday, I have tried to reach most, if not all, of the member States of this body. I met with some delegations twice or more, in order to understand their positions and look for possible ways to overcome this situation.

As it was difficult to agree new language due to some national positions, in one of the meetings a delegation proposed to replace the eight operative paragraphs contained in document CD/WP.626/Rev.1, circulated on 13 February 2020, with the six operative paragraphs from the document CD/2119, adopted on 19 February 2018.

From the perspective of the six Presidents of this session, after consultations with many delegations, including regional coordinators, we reached the conclusion that this revised package could be workable. On Monday, many delegations requested more time to consider this proposal with their capitals. That is why we decided to postpone the adoption of the package. Yesterday, some delegations requested the possibility of having one plenary meeting to consider the proposal before its adoption.

After consultations between the six Presidents, who take all decisions jointly, we agreed to again postpone the adoption of the package. That is the current situation. I would like to inform you that we received strong encouragement from the majority of the dignitaries that participated in the high-level segment, including those from concerned States. With that impetus behind us, I am confident that we will continue to work with common sense and in good faith so that we are able to resume our real work. The programme of work is not the end of the road, but the beginning of a new phase for the disarmament machinery.

Listening yesterday to those delegations that exercised their right of reply strengthened my deep conviction that the world needs the Conference to return to work more than ever. We owe it to the international community, to our own countries, to our taxpayers, to the history of this body and to ourselves. Yesterday was a very interesting session, and I listened attentively to the delegations. Even though the secretary recommended me to not extend the right of reply, I decided to continue because it is important that everybody understands the situation we are in at the moment. We are not in a good situation, and that means that we need more than ever to start working in this room and in this Conference. Without cooperation and dialogue, we will never fulfil the purpose of establishing peace in this world. I think that yesterday's decision illustrated that the resolution of many problems depends on us not having intense arguments, but engaging in a normal conversation.

Now, the floor is open to any delegation that would like to express its views on the revised package. The distinguished representative of South Africa has the floor.

Mr. September (South Africa): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me start by reminding you that yesterday, Deputy Minister Botes indicated that South Africa is

committed to a functioning Conference on Disarmament. It is therefore important to ensure that the procedures are followed in a predictable and consistent manner.

In the considered view of South Africa, your draft should be first presented to the Conference for discussion. We would like to express our gratitude to you for allowing the Conference to first discuss the draft. This is in line with previous practice, which is normally for discussions to take place first in an informal and then in a formal setting. This enables delegations to ensure that all views from members are communicated to their respective capitals and views from capitals are shared with member States so that we can move forward towards a consensus on the draft, enriched by the views of member States.

I would like to emphasize the importance of following due process. We would like to caution against rushing, rather than allowing for the process to unfold naturally at its own pace. Building a consensus is not easy. It is hard work indeed. The Conference has been in deadlock for 24 years, and from our perspective, when an announcement is made that the deadlock has been finally broken, then that announcement must be backed up by a programme of work that we all can be proud of, that we all can take collective ownership of, and that we all can celebrate.

Finally, I would like to state for the record, as many delegations approached our delegation to enquire whether we supported the tabling of the 2018 decision as a programme of work, that South Africa never supported the tabling of the 2018 decision. We merely said, in an informal consultation that was held with some members of the Group of 21, that all proposals should, as a matter of procedure, be shared with all delegations so that the process was inclusive and transparent and served as a basis for discussions and consultations. At that time, it was apparent there was a lot of confusion as to what was on the table. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of South Africa. The distinguished representative of Mexico has the floor.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I would first like to acknowledge your efforts to continue building on the solid foundations of cooperation and coordination laid by the Algerian presidency, in particular the effort to work with the other presidencies of this session to find viable proposals for a programme of work with a clear basis in the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament. We appreciate your flexibility in allowing more time for interested delegations to examine your alternative proposal in greater detail.

Mr. President, we are grateful for the recent circulation of the document CD/WP.626/Rev.2, in which you seek to overcome the difficulties that some delegations raised in previous meetings regarding the proposal of the Algerian presidency. We note, however, that your draft proposal departs from the revised version of the working document that the Conference considered at its meeting of 14 February. In that context, we would like to have more information about the reasons for this change of approach. We know that consultations were held with several delegations and that alternative language was explored with a view to adapting the last Algerian proposal. However, in the interests of transparency and trust, we need to know more about the reasons that led to this new approach.

With regard to the content of your text, we see that the operative language of the decision contained in document CD/2119 is taken up verbatim, and only the title and the preambular paragraphs have been changed. In our opinion, that is not the correct way to proceed. If the proposed course of action is to reinstate a text that was adopted in 2018, let us be consistent with the approach contained therein.

Finally, we believe that your draft proposal requires further work to ensure that we are moving forward in the spirit of the decision contained in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. My delegation encourages you to continue your efforts to build a text that generates genuine consensus.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before I continue, I would like to explain, for reasons which I think are quite obvious, why it was not possible to move forward with the previous proposal. The new text that was circulated quite a while ago – some days ago –

contains these changes because they were suggested by certain delegations. In informal consultations, many of the delegations here present understood it to be a viable text. No one can say that this has taken him or her by surprise or that not enough time has been allowed for delegations to consult with capitals, considering this text was distributed on Monday morning. I wish to point this out in order to give an answer regarding the modification of the text. In other words, the previous text sadly was not viable, as was clearly indicated in this chamber in the statements of certain delegations that did not accept it. Thank you.

(spoke in English)

I will give the floor to the distinguished representative of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Thank you very much, Mr. President. First of all, we give heartfelt thanks for your tireless efforts to reach a consensus on this package. We much appreciate the new version which is before us. We also appreciate your cautious approach, so that all the member States of the Conference on Disarmament can take the time to consult with their capitals.

As you have clearly explained, for the most part this document reflects the consensus version of 2018, so I think there is no difficulty for us to adopt this. We share the sense of urgency that you have expressed and with which you have appealed to us all to find a consensus on this package document. It is all the more important that this body makes progress, given that the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is to be held in April. So, I fully support your proposal, both in terms of procedure and substance.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Japan. I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Australia.

Ms. Wood (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President. I do not have a prepared statement, but I wanted to provide a perspective from another of the countries that will hold the presidency in 2020. The six Presidents have worked together very closely on the draft programme of work and I think that the Conference on Disarmament is not used to such an approach. It is used to an approach whereby one presidency does its best to draw up a programme of work, then the next presidency starts all over again. That is not what we have done this time. The current presidency started on the basis that the Conference had a package to work with and conducted extensive consultations. I think it is positive that we are having this meeting today and that we are listening to all member States.

When I look at the two texts, I do not think this is a new proposal: it is not significantly different to what was presented a few weeks ago. I do not think that it contains anything unexpected, although I understand that the members of the Conference wish to understand more about the proposed changes. We think that the new draft protects the interests of everyone in this room, while allowing us to get back to work, as is our responsibility. What we have been doing is fine-tuning, rather than starting from scratch. This is an effort undertaken in good faith by the six Presidents on a package that provides the framework for substantive work. I agree with the distinguished colleague from South Africa, when he said that we would like a programme of work that we can be proud of. But we also want to be proud of the Conference. I think there are different views on what a programme of work is. According to the rules of procedure, the Conference should establish a programme of work at the start of the session, but the rules do not give much guidance as to what a programme of work should contain. My reading is that it is a tool for us to do our work; the work that we actually do is more important. Others feel very strongly that a programme of work needs to have a negotiating mandate. We would happily put forward such a programme; however, all of our consultations show that that this is simply not possible at this point in time. So, how do we get to negotiations? We need to have a framework where we can sit in this room, understand each other better and build towards common agendas on negotiating mandates.

As many of people said last week, "Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good". I think this is a genuine effort to provide a framework to get us back to work. It is the tool. The Conference does not exist to agree programmes of work, it exists to negotiate on disarmament and this is a way for us to try to achieve that.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Australia. The distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the floor.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to refer to the statements delivered during the high-level segment, in which all delegates emphasized the importance of preserving the negotiating mandate and the unique role and position of this august body and of avoiding any attempts to turn it into a deliberative mechanism.

I would also like to thank you for the informal consultations regarding the previous drafts, in which we participated, and which were the result of almost one month's intensive consultations during the Algerian presidency. That showed your dedication to accommodate the observations of concerned delegations. We encourage you to follow suit and hold further bilateral or plenary consultations, either in informal or formal settings, before we put this new draft to a decision. This is in accordance with rule 29 of the rules of procedure. I should also emphasize that we should avoid rushing to adopt something which lacks the basic elements that should be reflected in the programme of work.

The President: Thank you. As you mentioned, we have had intensive consultations, particularly with your delegation. Everybody in this room knows that we encountered some problems and that we kept trying. As the distinguished representative of Australia stated, some things were not possible because some delegations were not ready to approve the package. It is important to take into account that we are not in a hurry. We have been deliberating on this for 22 years. All we are trying to do is to approve a programme of work because that is our obligation according to the rules of procedure. We have the option to continue the situation in which the adoption of a programme of work is postponed for various reasons, or to try to approve something that might not be perfect but which is feasible. It is also important to take into account that this draft is the result of intensive, continuing consultations that we carried out with many members, including at weekends, to find common ground.

Now, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has the floor.

Mr. Al Ashkar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to begin by thanking you for distributing the revised version of the draft decision and for your efforts and those of your team in preparing it.

I would like to take the opportunity to make a few comments on the draft. First, in terms of the format of the draft, the consultations held by the Argentine presidency were on the text proposed by the Algerian presidency. The draft before us differs from the text that the Algerian presidency worked on, as it contains new substantive elements on which there has not been the necessary consultation. Consequently, we believe that, prior to the distribution of the revised draft, consultations should have taken place so that delegations could express their concerns and make comments and observations on the proposed text. My delegation therefore considers that there is a need for further consultation to ensure that we listen to all concerns and take them into account as we seek to build a consensus.

Second, in terms of content, we note that provisions of the decision contained in document CD/2119 were chosen selectively. Some of the elements of that decision were selected while others were disregarded, which affected the balance of the proposed text. This means that we have before us a different text from the one in the package on which the Algerian presidency worked.

I will limit myself to these preliminary observations. Let me conclude by saying that my delegation is aware of the great efforts made by the six Presidents of the 2020 session to explore ways to allow the Conference to return to its substantive work. At the same time, however, we believe that the draft that has been put forward still needs further consultation and refinement.

We thank you and express our readiness to interact constructively and positively with your endeavours to reach a consensus to resume the substantive work of the Conference. We hope that the open, transparent and inclusive approach of the Algerian presidency will continue.

The President: Thank you for your statement. Certainly, there are new elements; otherwise we would be considering the previous proposal, which was not accepted. Regarding the time set aside for consultations, many of which have been held already, I would like to reiterate that this new proposal is in any case based upon previous consultations. It is true that some of the content of the decision contained in document CD/2119 was selectively chosen, but that was done for positive reasons, taking into account that the paragraphs in question have been accepted previously. We are trying to find something that, as I said before, is feasible. I thank the Syrian delegation for stating its intention to cooperate with this presidency. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Austria.

Mr. Müller (Austria): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I did not intend to take the floor, but I would like to welcome your opening statement in which you reminded us of our obligations to our taxpayers, to the wider world and to ourselves. I am proud to be a part of the team approach of the six Presidents. We have received plenty of positive feedback, including in the present discussion. Yet lip service is not enough. Everyone praises our team effort, but they should also give us a helping hand to reach a final outcome.

The fact that we are considering the second revision of the draft programme of work shows that a certain evolution has taken place. This has been an open, transparent and inclusive process in which we have tried to develop the draft on the basis of language that previously has been agreeable to this body.

In my view, a programme of work is an important sign that there is still life in this body. As others have said, ample time has been given for delegations to consider the draft carefully and to consult with capitals. For that purpose, the draft was made available three days ago, on Monday, 24 February 2020. From the beginning, the six Presidents chose a realistic approach. Like Australia, the Austrian delegation would have liked to see a more ambitious document containing a negotiating mandate, but I think we have to make a small first step in the right direction.

The President: Thank you, distinguished representative of Austria. I give the floor to distinguished Ambassador of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. As you have outlined, you undertook many consultations, as a result of which it became clear that the efforts of the Algerian presidency and the other presidencies of this session to find consensus on the original proposal were not successful. I understand that you went to great lengths in order to test all kinds of alternatives and additions to the proposal that was tabled by the Algerian presidency. The representative of Australia has given an apt description of that process. I fully understand that, in trying to lead us forward and find a solution to the impasse in which we found ourselves at the end of the Algerian presidency, you have reverted to agreed language from 2018 as a possible option that might enable our work this year. I would like to commend that effort.

I agree with my Austrian colleague that since this revised proposal was tabled on Monday morning, we have had ample time to look at it, to consult with capitals and to form an opinion on it. All the more so, since it is not new language, but text that was agreed in 2018. Now we are sitting in the Council Chamber, consulting on the text. So, if delegations have problems with the text as it is now, they should explain what they dislike and why they dislike something that they agreed in 2018. For my part, I hope that today we may enjoy a fruitful exchange, after which we will be able to adopt a programme of work. From my delegation's point of view, it could be either the revised draft you have circulated, or something different. We are flexible, because for us what matters is that the Conference on Disarmament resumes its work. So, I look forward to further exchanges and reiterate my hope that a decision will be forthcoming towards the end of this morning's meeting.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to clarify my earlier remarks to avoid any confusion. When I mentioned that intensive consultations were held, I was referring to the Algerian proposal, not the new text. Having

said that, I propose, if it is possible, Mr. President, to continue this plenary meeting in an informal setting, so that the delegations can express their observations freely. That might help us to decide whether to enter into discussions on the substance of the new draft.

The President: Thank you, distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lee Jang-keun (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. I would also like to thank you and the other presidencies of this session for your efforts and hard work to reach an agreement on the proposed package of the programme of work, which is an urgent task for all of us. I requested the floor to add my voice to the previous speakers and to express my strong support for the revised draft, which is the result of the intensive consultations undertaken by the six Presidents of this session, bilaterally, informally and in the setting of the regional groups.

As my minister stressed in her statement on Monday, given the current security environment and the challenges we face, we cannot afford to waste any more time or effort in restoring the credibility of the Conference on Disarmament. Why have we lost this credibility? Mainly because of the failure to agree on a programme of work for more than 20 years, and even up to 24 years, as one member State pointed out. This time, the proposed package was prepared jointly by the six Presidents and supported by almost all delegations. I understand that the Western European and Other States, the Group of 21 and the Group of One all supported the draft. We believe that we should not let this rare opportunity, created in a cooperative spirit, slip away due to some differences between us.

In this context, my delegation urges us all to show the maximum flexibility and cooperation in the hope that we can agree on the proposed package, if not today, then in the not-too-distant future, so that we can engage promptly in substantive discussions.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the Republic of Korea. I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. Youssef (Egypt): Thank you very much, Mr. President. As this is the first time I am taking the floor under your presidency, allow me to congratulate you on assuming your responsibility as President of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for all the efforts you have undertaken and for the understanding and cooperation that you have demonstrated. I would also like to congratulate you for the successful high-level segment of the Conference which took place earlier this week.

Mr. President, we firmly believe that the impasse in the Conference must not persist and that the Conference must spare no effort to break the deadlock and resume its substantive work. However, this must not be achieved at the expense of the Conference's mandate.

Since we have been invited today to present our views on the revised draft proposal, I would like to offer my delegation's preliminary remarks. We note that the changes you have introduced in the draft are based on the decision contained in document CD/2119 of 2018, and we would like to emphasize that this substantially changes the essence and the core of the Algerian proposal. Given the nature and objectives of the 2018 decision, we believe it is necessary to change the title of the document.

We also believe that if we are to take forward this proposal using the 2018 decision on the establishment of the subsidiary bodies as the basis for our work, we would like to include all the preambular paragraphs of that decision, which was delicately crafted and took into consideration the critical balance between the concerns of the different delegations; consequently, the omission of any of those paragraphs would disrupt that equilibrium.

The subsidiary bodies established in previous years did valuable work. Unfortunately, that work was not kept alive nor documented, since the subsidiary bodies worked in an informal manner. We hope that we can avoid repeating the same mistake this year.

We took note, too, of the list of proposed coordinators of the subsidiary bodies and the special coordinator, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank the distinguished Ambassadors for their willingness to assume this responsibility. We are confident that they will carry out their duties with highest level of professionalism, impartiality and integrity.

Finally, Mr President, my delegation has been very appreciative and supportive of the efforts of the six Presidents of this session and we are determined to strongly support your presidency. We should strive to preserve the Conference and its credibility and we believe that your proposal, with some minor amendments, could achieve that end.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador. Now I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. We have before us a draft proposal, which is new because it is dated 24 February 2020, but which is not really new because it refers to a text from two years ago. We have had four days to analyse it, study it, consult it, turn it over; at two pages it is not very long. During that time I have received from my capital more than 200 other documents that I have had to look through, and they were much longer. We are now in a formal, open, transparent meeting in which we can discuss our opinions and motivations in a polite, proper and constructive way, with no need to continue in informal meetings in which not all of us receive all the information and the reasons for outcomes are unclear. Now is the time to speak with clarity and for each of us to say what we consider to be right or wrong about this draft proposal.

Of course, it is not an ideal proposal. Some of us might prefer the previous draft. Nor is it a proposal that allows us to start negotiating straight away. But it is a proposal that allows us to create the conditions for that negotiation to take place; so that we can generate trust and dialogue so that we can return to the negotiating table in the near future.

What we have to do is send a message to the international community that we can assume our responsibility, as you have said. We cannot be proud of another failure. The document on the table is what is possible today. Tomorrow it might no longer be possible, and we might be closing another window of opportunity. If we do not have the courage to send a political message by formally adopting a real programme of work – which is what this is – then we have to accept that we are not credible and keep going round in circles for another 22 years.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of Spain. The Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the floor.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, we would like to acknowledge your efforts in guiding our work. We are certain that you will successfully continue the steps begun by the Algerian delegation.

Mr. President, my capital is constructively studying the proposals circulated by the presidency, which were received on Monday. We are therefore awaiting instructions from our capital. We tentatively note that the draft proposal for a programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament for 2020 includes changes to the draft proposal that was originally discussed under the presidency of Algeria. The Algerian proposals represented a delicate balance that my delegation was prepared to consider, showing the utmost flexibility, in order to reach a solution that might gradually lead to the Conference overcoming its regrettable stalemate. On the other hand, the decision adopted in February 2018, whose operative paragraphs have replaced the operative paragraphs of the draft proposal contained in document CD/WP.626/Rev.1, responded to a very specific international environment. My delegation considers that the draft proposal for a programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament for 2020 is a main document, whereas the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.627/Rev.1 is accessory or subsequent to the main decision.

According to rule 28 of the rules of procedure, the preparation of the programme of work must include the recommendations, proposals or decisions referred to in rule 27, which states that “the Conference shall take into account the recommendations made to it

by the General Assembly, the proposals presented by members States of the Conference and the decisions of the Conference". Under rule 19, the work of the Conference shall be conducted primarily in plenary meetings, although it may use other arrangements, such as informal meetings. Plenary meetings have been the regular working mechanism of this Conference, since they are open-ended meetings for its member States. During these meetings, member States exercise their right to be heard by all participating members. At the same time, both formal and informal plenary meetings are inclusive and transparent, providing a space for delegations to take responsibility for their statements and to receive formal feedback on their concerns and proposals.

In the Conference's formal meetings, States' views on the topics discussed are set down in official records, which allows for the keeping of documentary evidence on relevant aspects of decisions taken, and for the building of consensus despite potential differences. In the light of the above, we are grateful, Mr. President, that you have convened this formal plenary meeting. My delegation would prefer that we subsequently move to an informal setting to discuss the document properly, in a relaxed manner, in accordance with the rules of procedure.

The duties of the President include circulating proposals and holding informal consultations, either bilaterally or in more open formats, and with the broader regional groups, as these are informative mechanisms that are useful for finding consensus solutions. We thank you, Mr. President, for the extensive consultations you have held. In this context, it should be stressed that the Group of 21 has not yet held consultations on this particular document that has been submitted, and my delegation needs to hear the comments and opinions of other delegations in the Conference in order to form a better judgment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Ambassador. Rules 27 and 28 of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament are the guidelines that must be followed in order to adopt the agenda and the programme of work. In our opinion, these are rules that complement and reinforce each other and should be interpreted as a whole. To comply with both rules, the preparation of the agenda and the planning of activities should take into account the recommendations that the General Assembly makes to the Conference, the proposals presented by the member States of the Conference and the decisions of the Conference. As a result of various recommendations made over the past 20 years, many elements relating to the programme of work have begun to take shape, namely those of adopting and implementing a balanced and comprehensive programme of work at the earliest possible date, preferably at the beginning of each session, on the basis of document CD/1864.

I give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Makarowski (Sweden): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Allow me to thank you and the other Presidents of this session for your efforts. You are continuing the good work started by the Algerian Ambassador, who proposed a good text. My delegation, and seemingly almost all delegations, were ready to accept and approve that text. However, the text was sent back and you have redrafted it and introduced some proposals. Now it seems it is time for action.

Mr. President, I have been in the Conference on Disarmament for far too long. This is my fifth year and I have heard all kinds of statements in this room. One of the best I have heard was your statement last Friday, when you called for common sense, and that call was fully supported by my foreign minister in her statement to the Conference on Tuesday.

We know what we have in front of us. We know what the proposal is and what it is not. It is not ideal, but it is possible. It should be recalled that the decisions adopted in 2018 reflected the political will to do something. If there is no political will, then we will continue to sit in this room hearing all kinds of arguments not to do anything for another 20 or 25 years. What we have in front of us, as I said, is not ideal. But it is something. Another very good comment I heard in this room was made by the former Brazilian Ambassador, Ambassador de Aguiar Patriota, during the negotiations in 2018. He famously said "something is better than nothing". Now we have something which is possible. We should heed your appeal for common sense and political will and adopt it. The alternative is nothing, yet again.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Sweden. Thank you for your words regarding the presidency. Now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Turkey.

Mr. Güneş (Turkey): Thank you very much, indeed, Mr. President. I wished to briefly take the floor to commend the efforts of the six Presidents of the 2020 session. I would like to remind you that we supported the text that was presented by the Algerian presidency and to state that Turkey also supports the package as it stands.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Turkey. I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Belgium.

Ms. Marchand (Belgium): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation of the six Presidents for their positive spirit of cooperation since January and for their extensive work to move us closer to a consensus.

My country supports the package that you proposed and the revised version that we have in front of us. We were very close to a consensus in the last week of the Algerian presidency. Both the previous and the current presidencies have been mindful not to pressure any delegation, and both presidencies have taken the time needed to consult all delegations that still had difficulties in adopting the text. This new revised version that takes agreed language from 2018 is the result of the further consultations that you have conducted in the last two weeks. As has been stressed by other colleagues, this is agreed language, which should be agreeable to all.

We also share your sense, Mr. President, that we should not waste more time. We believe that we have consulted enough. It is time for the Conference to break the stalemate. It is time for us to show that we can find a consensus on a programme of work that even goes beyond a decision on the establishment of subsidiary bodies. My delegation would like to encourage all colleagues to show maximum flexibility and a sense of constructive cooperation.

As my minister stressed earlier this week, there is no excuse for inaction at a time when we need more than ever to demonstrate that we can move forward.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Belgium. Thank you for your words regarding this presidency. Now I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Mr. President. I had not intended to take the floor but I am doing so now because I would like to draw your attention to what I consider to be a paradox, or rather a sort of peculiarity.

We have just emerged from a high-level segment this week – on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday – during which, on all three days, I listened carefully to each speaker. Mr. President, every speaker who took the floor called for us to get back to work, without exception. Yet, 24 hours later, we find ourselves in the same situation, which ultimately amounts to ineffective multilateralism.

I am not sure how to interpret this fact. It has left me a little perplexed, with the unpleasant feeling that the will to understand one another is lacking. Perhaps there is a lack of will to find compromise solutions. Perhaps there is also a desire to have everything at once, at the risk of being left with nothing at all. That is ineffective multilateralism.

I do not think that this situation is good for this forum. Indeed, I am convinced that it is not. To be quite honest, I am convinced that we can do things differently. As you said in your introductory remarks, it is possible for us to have a normal conversation among professionals. I am speaking frankly because, in all honesty, my delegation is fully convinced that, whether we agree on the version of the proposal contained in CD/WP.626/Rev.1, CD/WP.626/Rev.2 or CD/WP.626/Rev.3, what we do in practice will remain the same.

As it stands, we are wallowing in the details and it is preventing us from doing what we should be doing, which is getting on with our substantial work. We are all experts in this

chamber. We are all technical experts, yet we are wasting our talents on these endless procedural discussions, which do nothing to advance the cause of disarmament.

I am aware that my having said all this is ultimately pointless, since, in the end, to be right alone is to be wrong. We need consensus. I respect all positions, of course, but I nonetheless wish to call for pragmatism. We all have a duty to support the presidency and you should know, Mr. President, that from the very beginning of this session my delegation has maintained that it will be flexible and is willing to support you. Again, I wish to thank you and all six Presidents of this session for your efforts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The representative of Mexico has the floor.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I have been listening to the delegations' observations to find out the different positions of member States and to determine whether greater clarity might be forthcoming on the reasons that brought about the change in the approach to the draft proposal. I understand that you have said that the reasons were obvious, but unfortunately what seems obvious to some is not so obvious to others, especially if some delegations were not involved in the consultations. We understand that there were some draft amendments to the Algerian proposal in respect of the language of the second operative paragraph and the thematic balance between the subsidiary bodies. We know that work was done on those amendments and we would like to know more about the different alternatives that were considered. I ask this question with total respect and, of course, I would expect a respectful answer.

We understand from your proposal that this latest version of the document takes up the text from 2018; however, that was a decision that was adopted in a specific context. For my delegation, it is clear that not only the Conference on Disarmament, but also the General Assembly, in its resolution A/RES/73/81, noted that the Conference did not agree on a programme of work in 2018. Obviously we can discuss the reasons, but if, as the different presidencies of this session and several delegations have said, the objective is to resume substantive discussions on the understanding that there is no context for conducting negotiations at this time – in which regard delegations may have different views – then making the discussions more complex by generating a whole debate on what a programme of work should be, or even on the different interpretations that members have of the meaning of negotiation, cannot be regarded as furthering that objective.

For my delegation, if the proposed course of action is to resume the work of 2018, let us accept that that is the procedure and recognize, as is reflected in document CD/2166 submitted by the United Kingdom last year and in the previous versions of document CD/WP.626/Rev.2, that there is a need to refine the mandate of these subsidiary bodies and that they should not simply repeat a pattern of decision-making, but should be adapted in view of what happened in the previous exercise.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you. To clarify, when I referred to obvious reasons, it was in the sense that the previous package was not adopted and it was clear from the discussions held at the time that its adoption was not possible. That is what I meant when I said that there were obvious reasons why that package could not be accepted.

(*spoke in English*):

I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. Since this is the first time we have taken the floor during your presidency, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on assuming this important responsibility. We thank you for the revised proposal and we appreciate the extensive consultations you have undertaken. We also thank you for providing the members with an opportunity to reflect on the proposal that you presented. Your commitment and hard work, coupled with the able support of your excellent team, continue to bring us closer towards the resumption of substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President, as you would recall from our discussions over the past few weeks, many members have called for a practical and balanced approach to our work. As we endeavour to find a solution, I reiterate the significance of realism and balance in our efforts. This requires that we look at things as they are and not how we wish they were, or how they should be. One of the realities that I have referred to in this room is that there is no consensus to commence negotiations on any issue on the Conference's agenda. And increasingly, as we have witnessed in the past few weeks, we are finding it very difficult to even reach agreement on process and procedure. We are fully aware that the 2018 document was a compromise proposal. While it does not touch on any red lines, neither does it fully cater to any member's aspirations nor reflect our ultimate objective, which remains nuclear disarmament.

In our view, your proposal is a recognition of how things stand. Therefore, until we can set about addressing the larger realities that govern our work, your proposal remains the only practical option. We can go along with it.

In pursuing our work, however, we must continue to ensure equal treatment and equal preference for each agenda item. An objective approach, devoid of arbitrary or subjective notions, remains fundamental. It remains also crucial to address the legitimate concerns of all delegations. Our work should continue to be comprehensive, practical and balanced.

It is in this spirit, Mr. President, that we see value in your proposal for holding deliberations similar to those of the subsidiary bodies in 2018. Certainly, this is not an optimal solution, but it would meet our approval in the given circumstances. Such an exercise – that is, deliberations in subsidiary bodies – would help us develop a better understanding of various perspectives, explore areas of convergence and identify major differences. It would also afford an opportunity for us to tailor our work to respond to contemporary challenges that shape our environment.

My delegation looks forward to continued constructive engagement and reaffirms its commitment to continue working for a solution that meets with the consent of all members of the Conference.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan. Now, the distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands has the floor.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation has been listening carefully to the statements today, just as I think we all listened very carefully to the statements of the ministers who were here at the beginning of this week. Like my French colleague, I am somewhat confused and puzzled by the paradox, as he called it. As you said, we have been talking for 1,600 hours about this and you, as the incoming President, have a mandate to put forward a programme of work, continuing the careful efforts undertaken by the Algerian Ambassador.

As others have said, the overwhelming message from the high-level segment was for this body to resume its work. That what all the six Presidents of this session are attempting. We should not underestimate the significance of this being an effort by six different countries from different regions, who have staked their prestige on getting the Conference on Disarmament started again.

Last year, my delegation submitted a working paper entitled "Back to basics – the programme of work" to remind this body that a programme of work is nothing more than a planning tool. This was amply illustrated by the compilation of over 20 pages that we received from the secretariat and which was shared by many in this room.

At the beginning of this year, under the excellent leadership of Algeria, and thanks to a joint effort by the six Presidents, we were provided with the planning for this session, as contained in the first part of the draft programme of work. At the request of many delegations, subsidiary bodies and a coordinator on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference were then added to the package. That package was negotiated in a transparent, open and inclusive manner, in good faith, in formal and informal sessions, by all six presidencies. We would have reached a consensus on this package, but for a few

countries – actually, three delegations – that could not agree to it. That is why we are here today.

You, Mr. President, came up with a new suggestion, based on the 2018 decision, which was adopted by consensus at that time. Some delegations have mentioned that we have been in a deadlock for 22 years, which we were, but in 2018 we managed to get some work done. We had five subsidiary bodies and four of them were able to adopt consensus reports. So on that basis, Mr. President, I fully align myself with the words you spoke at the beginning of this meeting about the procedure. I also agree with the delegations that said the Conference should not waste any more time. On the procedure, therefore, I would not be in favour of holding more informal consultations. Of course, we are in your hands, Mr. President, but we should not wait too long before adopting the package.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands. Thank you for your words regarding this presidency. The distinguished representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has the floor.

Mr. Al Ashkar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. I will be brief. I would like to propose that, in order to listen to delegations' opinions and concerns freely, get a better picture of their reactions and exchange views, we should make this meeting an informal one.

The President: Thank you, distinguished representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. Now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Norway.

Ms. Cervenka (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to thank your team and all of the Presidents of this session for the work you have done to seek a consensus.

I take the floor now to echo the calls that have been made today to support the package that we have before us, so that we can collectively resume work. We have no more time to lose. You have called for a dose of common sense and your predecessor, the Algerian Ambassador, asked us to not allow the best to become the enemy of the good. I think there is a lot of wisdom in those two things taken together.

What we have on the table now may not be perfect from any single delegation's point of view, but it is something. It is something that is possible and it is something that will get us back to work. That in itself is something worth trying after all these years.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Norway. Now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of South Africa.

Mr. September (South Africa): Thank you, Mr. President. I just wanted to support the idea of my distinguished colleague from Syria. Maybe it is time for us to move to an informal session.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of South Africa. Now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Good morning, distinguished colleagues. I would also like to say a few words to thank the Argentine presidency for its work and for the efforts made by the presidency, and the six Presidents of the 2020 session, to find a possible compromise with a view to resuming substantive work in our Conference.

It is important, it seems to me, to understand that we are trying to accomplish two tasks here: a "maximum" task and a "minimum" one. The "maximum" task is to launch negotiations with a view to developing legally binding international agreements on the specific issues contained in the Conference's agenda. The "minimum" task is to launch, in a manner of speaking, substantive work in the Conference on the assumption that we are obviously unable to reach a compromise on launching the negotiation process.

With regard to accomplishing the "minimum" task, the Russian delegation fully supports your approach, Mr. President, namely to rely on the 2018 decision. Nevertheless, in our view, if we rely on documents and decisions from 2018, we need to be consistent and refrain from trying to give these decisions a new status, namely the status of a programme

of work. If we do give a new status to the 2018 decisions, we will thereby mislead the international community, as we will raise expectations for our work, and everyone will expect real results in the form of international legally binding instruments ready for adoption and conclusion. Regrettably, this is not what is dealt with in the 2018 documents and the package that you have put forward. They concern the continuation of in-depth discussions structured around the subsidiary bodies. It seems to me that this approach of elevating the status of decisions that have indeed been agreed by consensus but do not yet correspond to our understanding of a programme of work is risky for our future activities and those of the next session and subsequent ones.

I am grateful to my good colleague and friend Ambassador Hwang for his impassioned statement. The situation is indeed paradoxical: all the high-level officials who took the floor during the high-level segment spoke of the need to launch the Conference's activities and so on and so forth, but none of them advocated disregarding the rules of procedure or launching our work in the Conference at the expense of its own mandate. They all stressed the need to launch the Conference's work or to resume its activities in accordance with its mandate. This is what is expected of us. So the paradox is what it is, but there is a need for genuine objectivity.

It was also said that we should not get caught up in details, but frankly, if an unbalanced decision is a detail in which we should not get caught up, what can be the basis for our discussion, for a debate on the package of proposals? What details are we talking about exactly? Moreover, if the status of the document is not yet clear to us, or at least not to the Russian Federation, should we overlook this detail for the sake of adopting the document?

I would like to be properly understood. The Russian Federation fully supports all efforts to resume substantive work. We are also ready to consider any proposal that will bring us closer to starting the negotiation process, but let us be realistic and act in accordance with both the Conference's rules of procedure and its mandate.

One more thing: as you have rightly noted, Mr. President, in accordance with the rules of procedure, we have an obligation to adopt a programme of work. Yes, of course this is our obligation, but we also have a higher obligation, imposed on us by our membership of the Conference and by its mandate, which is to negotiate, so if we lose sight of this obligation and agree simply to conduct discussions and call this a programme of work and the true work of the Conference, we will end up being accused of effectively deceiving the international community and not fulfilling our own obligations. We want to avoid this.

The President: Thank you, distinguished representative of the Russian Federation. Now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Tomov (Bulgaria): Thank you, Mr. President. Dear colleagues, we have to remind ourselves that this year we have experienced a completely new approach towards our work. All delegations have expressed admiration and praise for the work of the Algerian and Argentinian presidencies and the team approach of the six Presidents of 2020 plus the last President of 2019 and the first President of 2021. Yet, we still have no consensus and it seems that no matter what arguments or reasons are advanced, we persist in preferring not to move forward but to sit and accept failure.

We have to remind ourselves that time is passing and it is already the end of February. We agree that there are no excuses for inaction or for being part of a failure. So, let us make the most of the new team approach that we are enjoying and seek solutions rather than arguments against the proposed means of moving forward.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Bulgaria. Distinguished representative of Canada, you have the floor.

Mr. Davison (Canada): Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for all your efforts, those of your team and those of the six Presidents of the 2020 session: first under the presidency of Algeria and now under your presidency.

I take the floor reluctantly because I feel that the delegations are becoming slightly polarized and I do not want to contribute to that. However, I feel it is necessary that I should set out the position of Canada in a formal manner. Two weeks ago, we would have accepted the proposal put forward by Algeria to create subsidiary bodies and a process led by Switzerland which would examine working methods through a series of consultations. We remain quite willing to accept that proposal.

We understand and we see the difference in the two texts. We agree that two weeks ago, the previous version of the draft programme of work came to an end. There were objections to it and there did not seem to be a way around those. You have since made a proposal in good faith. I hear our colleagues, however, who feel that they have not had enough time to discuss it in this room. Therefore, this meeting is necessary and useful and I am glad that you put it on the agenda.

Nevertheless, I am still concerned that in essence, the Algerian presidency proposed a package of two things and that you have done the same. The words have changed, but not the essence or the spirit of what is before us. If delegations have specific issues that they want to raise, formally or informally, then by all means, let them do so. But those who have said that the draft programme of work is something concrete to keep us occupied and to slowly advance the disarmament agenda within this body during 2020 should consider what it is we seek. Pakistan has very clearly made the point that there can be no negotiations and we agree with that assessment. I think everyone in this room agrees with that assessment. So, we should ask ourselves what is the next best thing. My delegation does not believe that it is to do nothing for the rest of the session.

The package that was proposed and agreed in essence at the end of the Algerian presidency was to create subsidiary bodies. That is what you have again proposed. However, we are a little unclear about some of the concerns that our colleagues have expressed, because we have not examined them in detail. Perhaps we will develop a better understanding through informal discussions, if we need more time to discuss this to agree. But we, too, feel that there is a paradox and that the discussions are becoming confusing.

Regarding the observations made by Russia, I do not quite see this revised draft as being the same as the 2018 package. Mr. President, you have recycled some words and paragraphs that were important in 2018, and which can still be important in 2020. However, you are also presenting everything for the Conference to consider all at once – two parts, an agenda and coordinators. In 2018, this was done step by step, by three presidencies over 12 weeks. This year, the process is advancing much faster and generally, agreement has been reached much more quickly. The package clearly consists in a programme of work, as it includes everything that the Conference intends to do for the whole year. That was not what was proposed in the decision taken at the end of the Sri Lankan presidency in February 2018, as is clear from the document CD/2119. It took the subsequent presidencies of Sweden and Switzerland to progress to a place comparable to where we are now. So, I would suggest that it is in our interests to embrace this effort soon. I feel the frustration in the room, and I do not want to create opposition between the Western European and Other States and the Group of 21 on this issue. I am quite happy to listen to our colleagues express their concerns in detail. Although I still feel that the proposal is based on that of the Algerian presidency; namely, to establish subsidiary bodies and a process led by Switzerland, we are willing to accept what the presidency has done and would support its proposal.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Canada. Thank you for your support for this presidency. I want to clarify something that has been mentioned on many occasions in this room and may not have been understood correctly. From the formal point of view, the reality is that the package is proposed by this presidency. However, as the previous President mentioned on many occasions, the package is not the sole responsibility of the Argentinian presidency. This is a package presented by the six Presidents of the 2020 session, including the Algerian delegation. I think it is important to take into account that this is not something new that came from the Argentinian presidency; every single step and every single decision, regarding content or procedure, is discussed and decided upon by all six presidencies. If any member or group coordinator comes to see me with a request, I always say that I may have a view but I do not take any decisions without consulting the

other Presidents. So, I think it is important to clarify that the revised draft is not a document presented by the Argentinian presidency, it is presented by the six Presidents.

Is there any other delegation wishing to take the floor? The delegation of Cuba has the floor.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I have a question regarding how you intend to proceed. Will we move to an informal meeting or continue in plenary?

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): For the time being, we will continue the plenary meeting.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, as this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor during your presidency, we would like to congratulate you on your appointment and wish you every success in your work. We appreciate the intensive bilateral consultations and the personal efforts that you and your team have made. As you know, your country has our backing and we assure you of our support in working to achieve a comprehensive and balanced programme of work. We also appreciate the support you have given to the Group of 21 and the fact that you have convened this meeting to consider the new proposals that have been put forward as a result of the cohesive work carried out jointly by the six Presidents of this session under your leadership.

We would like now to refer to those proposals, which as you rightly point out are the outcome of a proposal put forward by one delegation. We would like to pass on some reflections to help you in your efforts to achieve a necessary consensus. According to my notes, the Conference on Disarmament failed to adopt the package presented by Algeria by a very narrow margin. I think that is the feeling shared in this chamber. In the end, only three unresolved issues remained on the table. The first was the title of the so-called “programme of work” document, which some delegations felt should be changed because, in their view, what was being adopted was not a true programme of work. As for Cuba, we were ready to adopt the draft with the title as it stood.

The second, more complex issue was that it was felt that we should make a greater effort to strengthen the negotiating mandate in the language presented by the six Presidents under the Algerian presidency. In that regard, there were calls to strengthen the second operative paragraph; to work on the reference to subsidiary body 2 in the draft decision on the implementation of the programme of work; and it was even suggested in this chamber that, for the purposes of flexibility, weaker language in the programme of work might be acceptable if the package did not address the subject of working methods, which as everyone knows is a procedural rather than a substantive issue and therefore does not fall under any agenda item.

The third issue, according to our notes, referred to the need to strengthen the language in the third column of the table contained in the draft decision on the implementation of the programme of work.

We came out of the last meeting under the Algerian presidency with hope that a linguistic solution was a definite possibility. We understood that there was a solution to the issue relating to the title of the “programme of work” document and that, while it would be difficult and perhaps impossible to find a solution to the second issue – that of strengthening the negotiating mandate – such a solution might be found by working on the language in the third column of the table contained in the draft decision on implementation. We thought that this might be the solution that would allow the adoption of the consensus package that we so badly need. We thought that strengthening the language on subsidiary bodies 1 and 3, specifically by reflecting the progress achieved in 2018 in identifying the key elements to be discussed in each subsidiary body, might be enough. We thought this might perhaps yield a positive outcome.

However, we understand that, in an informal consultation, one member, acting in the best of faith, proposed to return to the language from 2018 and that the six Presidents of the session understood that this could be an option; in other words, to take us back two years. In this scenario, we wish to point out that in 2018 there was no package contemplating a

procedure for improving the Conference's methods of work and that the delegations that accepted the 2018 decision did so in a totally different context. In fact, on accepting that decision, several delegations expressed reservations and concerns that we were changing the nature of the Conference by turning it into a deliberative body, rather than a negotiating body as established by its mandate.

In our view, taking up the issue of methods of work this year would heighten the same concern that was expressed two years ago. I do not think it is healthy for delegations to start pushing, or polarizing the situation, because I do not believe that a struggle would lead us to a different outcome than the one we have known for 24 years. That is why Cuba will work very closely and constructively with you.

We think that we should take advantage of this moment in which you have wisely called us together to reflect on the best solution for moving forward. I have listened carefully to my colleagues and, based on what I have heard, there are two key questions that we should be asking ourselves today. The first is whether these new proposals respond to the issues that prevented the adoption of the package presented by Algeria two weeks ago, and consequently whether we are moving closer to or further away from consensus.

The title of the "programme of work" was changed, so the second question is whether the new draft proposal strengthens the language on the negotiating mandate or dilutes it by taking up the language from 2018. The 2018 language avoids the problematic points that were raised this year. For example, I remember that some concerns were raised about the language on subsidiary body 5 that was contained in the draft decision on implementation. However, by returning to the 2018 decision, this same language is now being put back into the programme of work.

Another question that might emerge in our current situation is whether these new proposals might unravel a package that includes the issue of working methods. We strongly support the joint efforts of the six Presidents, which commenced under the Algerian presidency and continue under your wise leadership. But we are concerned, and we say this in the best spirit of cooperation, that pushing in the wrong direction will fracture the fragile and balanced consensus which we believe we have been building this year, both under the Algerian presidency and under your presidency. We are not in 2018 and the proposals on the table are not the same as in 2018.

In our view, we must avoid having some delegations block the presidential statement on methods of work while others block the programme of work because their concern has not been understood. In such a scenario, we believe that two extremes in the Chamber would converge for the first time to prevent us from achieving an outcome. We must work for a win-win formula and not a lose-lose one. We stand with you, confident that you will do your utmost to bring the positions of all the member States closer together. Have no doubt that Cuba will support you in this endeavour.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of Cuba. I believe that your statement, in which you gave an account of the sequence of events of recent weeks, was very pertinent. It is important to note that, as you pointed out, the Cuban delegation had some observations on the package that was presented previously, and you have indicated precisely what those observations were. This calls for some reflection concerning the perception and the reality of what occurred. The perception was that we were close to a consensus on the package. But the reality is that we were not very close because, after that package had been presented and considered in this chamber, and after objections to it had been raised, ceaseless efforts were undertaken with the few delegations that had made observations, to try to move towards a consensus text.

I say this to make clear that we have not arrived at this moment without trying to walk the path of consensus; we did so through an almost exegetical analysis, word for word, of the text that was presented. On that path, we were able to observe that a number of differences emerged, together with a number of proposals, all of which, in the search for a cooperative construction, also ended in significant divergences. Those divergences were so great that it was impossible to reach an agreement with slight or small amendments. I would like to point out that the previous package was not only discussed in this chamber, but it also continued to be the subject of informal discussions in order to find common

ground between the delegations that had made observations. Regrettably, that was not possible and that is why other options and alternatives were sought. Now, the idea of the six Presidents of this session – originally put forward by one delegation but later adopted by the six Presidents, with the best of intentions – was to look for expressions that had been agreed upon in the past as the basis for finding common ground. It is important to bear in mind that it was not simply a case of turning the page from one proposal to another. In fact, many efforts were made to bring positions closer together, but unfortunately that was not possible. Thank you.

(spoke in English)

I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) *(spoke in French)*: Thank you, Mr. President. As this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor under your presidency, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of that office. Let me also thank you and the other Presidents of this session for your considerable efforts. I would also like to thank you for the opportunity that was given today to all delegations to hold inclusive and transparent consultations on the package, thus allowing them to express their views.

The position of Switzerland, as we have stated several times, is that it would have been ideal to have been able to commence negotiations. That is currently not possible. We were close to achieving a consensus two weeks ago and we could have supported the proposal submitted by the Algerian presidency. Today, we can support the revised package.

If we look to the history of the Conference, there has only ever been one programme of work that received a clear negotiating mandate, and my delegation therefore supports the document submitted as a programme of work as a basis for moving forward. Adopting a programme of work today would be a signal for the Conference to move forward pragmatically.

Having said that, we also understand that some delegations wish to take a more detailed position, and we are ready, if necessary, to support the holding of informal consultations.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Switzerland. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? Distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, you have the floor.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President, and sorry for taking the floor again. I do not intend to enter into the substance of the new text, but I would like to put on record three points. Firstly, the 2018 decisions were taken in a quite different context and that we have to be aware of that context. Secondly, in 2018 there was not a package to be considered; there were only two decisions. And thirdly, the text of the 2018 decisions has been modified so that the title and the preambular paragraphs are different in the new text that you have proposed, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Distinguished representative of the Russian Federation, you have the floor.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: I would like to mention, Mr. President, that the Russian Federation has a number of comments on the documents that you have put forward. They concern the preamble, the section containing the timetable of meetings, the operative part and the document containing the timetable of the activities of the subsidiary bodies. We are ready to submit these comments in writing and have no objection to their being made available to other delegations.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation. I see no other requests for the floor.

Yesterday, delegations made requests to exercise their right of reply during the plenary meeting today. I would like to give the floor to the first delegation on my list. Distinguished delegate of the Russian Federation, you have the floor.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: Mr. President, we would actually like to reserve the right to reply to the statement made by the delegation of the

United States, but, in line with the recommendations of the Conference secretariat, we are prepared to speak now.

In their statement, our American colleagues expressed a number of ideas that offer a different interpretation of the current situation in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Russia was again accused of aggressive intentions, and the situation in Ukraine was brought up as an example.

In this connection, I would like to recall the “peace-loving” and “humanity-loving” policies of the United States, which led to tragedy in Serbia in 1997, in Iraq in 2003, in Libya in 2011 and in Syria in 2013. The tragedy has not ended, with American military units illegally stationed in Syria. In this way, the “peace-loving” foreign policy of the United States has brought sorrow, misery and death not only to individual States, but also to entire regions. This is what we have to say regarding the aggressive intentions of the Russian Federation.

In addition, it was said that the United States is not the only party to the bilateral and multilateral instruments currently or previously in force in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, and that the United States has been forced to change its position regarding many of these instruments and, in particular, to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty because Russia and China are building up their military capabilities.

Yes, the United States is indeed not the only party to these treaties, but, as was made clear, with the support of facts, in the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, the United States is the only State party to these treaties that has repeatedly violated them. Withdrawal from these treaties is due not to the fact that another State is building up its military capabilities, but to a desire to gain total freedom to achieve military domination over other States.

In addition, it was said that the United States would not continue to participate in the drafting, conclusion or renewal of agreements unless it could be confident that the compliance of other States with their provisions could be verified. It is obvious that such a policy leads to the complete collapse of the entire system of international agreements on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and, as a result, threatens international security.

Such statements by the United States of America are a clear example of the manipulation of the international community’s opinion and an attempt to mislead it and shift all responsibility for its destructive actions to other States.

I recall that it was the United States of America that, in October 2018, announced at the very highest level its plans to build up its nuclear missile capabilities. This is also confirmed by the fact that, immediately after the withdrawal of the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the United States conducted flight tests of missile systems that were previously prohibited under that Treaty and also announced the deployment of these missile systems in a number of regions. This all goes to show that the United States is solely responsible for the current arms control crisis and the creation of new threats and challenges to international security.

The President: Thank you, distinguished representative of the Russian Federation. The second delegation on my list that wishes to exercise its right of reply is Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Alwasil (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation wishes to use the right of reply to respond to the allegations contained in the statement made by the head of the Iranian delegation during his participation in the high-level session.

First of all, I would like to point out that the Iranian regime has always said that it supports the initiatives of the Conference on Disarmament and efforts to break the impasse in this negotiating forum. However, in its usual fashion, which is well known to the people of the region, Iran is doing two contradictory things at the same time. We all saw how Iran sabotaged the Algerian initiative during the first part of the session – the package of draft documents – for non-objective reasons, thus highlighting the Iranian regime’s disregard for

any such efforts. Iran is not serious about reaching any multilateral agreement unless the agreement fulfils all of its ambitions.

Second, in this chamber, the head of the Iranian delegation mentioned several fallacies to cover up the heinous crimes committed by their Houthi proxies in Yemen. I would like to recall that Saudi Arabia did not initiate the war in Yemen. Rather, it was the Houthi fundamentalist terrorist group backed by Iran that turned against legitimacy and against the legitimate Yemeni President, expelling him from Sana'a and chasing him to Aden, where he was killed. All of this was done in order to establish a new platform for Iranian influence in the region and give it a bargaining chip internationally. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2216, the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen was established to help restore power. This has been documented in United Nations reports. Iran is supporting non-State groups such as the Houthi extremist group by sending and transferring ballistic missile technology to them. It also supports extremist groups in the region, such as Hizbullah and others, recruits children and bombs innocent civilians in Yemen. Its militias have besieged and starved all villages and cities that refuse to obey the orders of the Houthi terrorist group. Landmines are planted randomly in all liberated areas. This is in addition to the recruitment of children and blocking of aid convoys, which it then sends to areas loyal to it in order to punish and starve those that support the legitimate Government. All of these practices are carried out by Iran in all of the regions in which it has influence.

Finally, Mr. President, and this is a matter of concern to all the peoples of the region, last week we saw the United States Navy seize an Iranian ship carrying ballistic missiles, which was headed to the Houthis in Yemen. Will we one day witness the smuggling of internationally prohibited chemical or biological weapons to the proxies of Iran in the region? I wish to bring this to the attention of the international community.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Saudi Arabia. That concludes our business for today. We will seriously and carefully consider all the different observations that each delegation has made today. The Syrian Arab Republic wishes to take the floor.

Mr. Al Ashkar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. Sorry for taking the floor at this late stage of the meeting. Though I would have preferred to have the opportunity for a broader exchange of views in an informal meeting, as that is not the case I will make a few comments now, if you allow me, on the proposed draft.

First, the context in which the decision contained in document CD/2119 was adopted was different from the current context; that decision was not part of a package. We have already clarified our delegation's position on the package during informal consultations, both with you, Mr. President, and during the Algerian presidency, and we have expressed it repeatedly during past sessions. That position remains unchanged.

Second, regarding the title of the draft, the second preambular paragraph of the proposed text reads: "In order to provide a programme of work for the Conference which does not prejudice any past, present or future position, proposal or priority of any delegation". In our view this statement is something of a contradiction with the title of the draft: "programme of work". The current title of the proposed text is not consistent with the content of the decision, as it does not provide for a specific negotiating mandate. We would therefore be in favour of changing the title of the draft from "programme of work" to "decision", in keeping with document CD/2119.

As I mentioned in my earlier intervention, we believe that the selective inclusion of some elements of the decision contained in document CD/2119 and the omission of others affected the balance of the text. Accordingly, we are proposing amendments with the aim of ensuring that the Conference's mandate serves as the main guide for our work. The first proposal is to add preambular paragraphs 9 and 11 of the decision contained in document CD/2119 to the preamble of the revised text, and to replace preambular paragraph 4 of the revised text with preambular paragraph 7 of the decision contained in document CD/2119. With regard to operative paragraph 1 of the proposed text, we believe that the language should be strengthened in such a way as to place the negotiating mandate of the Conference at the centre of our work, for which the draft decision lays the foundation.

I thank you for your efforts, Mr. President, and express our readiness to interact constructively and in a positive spirit with you to reach a consensus to resume the substantive work of the Conference as soon as possible.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. Distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, you have the floor.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I am taking the floor to exercise my right of reply to what has been said by the representative of the Saudi Arabian regime. It is ridiculous and weird for a country with the darkest record of war crimes in the region to talk about other countries.

Mr. President, I would like to emphasize that, apart from terrorist groups, only the Saudi regime would consider a bus full of students to be a legitimate target. Apart from terrorist groups, only the military of the Saudi regime would attack a wedding ceremony and kill innocent people. As had been said, Wahhabism is the ideology that inspired terrorist groups such as Daesh and Al-Qaida, while the petrodollar of these regimes is the treasury of such groups. Having said that, I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As I said, that concludes the meeting for today. We will take into consideration every single observation. Independently of that, I would like to let you know that I am completely open to consultations in any kind of format, whether individual, bilateral or with regional groups. I want to point out that if, by any chance, any member State has not been directly contacted, it is completely free to contact me. I am available all the time, including at weekends, for any consultations or to hear suggestions that you may wish to make regarding the issues under discussion. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, 3 March 2020, at 3 p.m. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.