

# Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 27 August 2020, at 10.10 a.m.

*President:* Mr. Yury Ambrazevich .....(Belarus)

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I call to order the 1544th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour for Belarus to assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Belbaki, the Ambassador of Algeria, and Mr. Foradori, the Ambassador of Argentina, for their efforts to draw up the draft programme of work of the Conference, Ms. Mansfield, the Ambassador of Australia, for continuing our important work during the quarantine, and Mr. Müller, the Ambassador of Austria, and Mr. Ahsan, the Ambassador of Bangladesh, for the successful resumption of the meetings of the Conference and for the constructive discussions that were held under their presidency. I would also like to thank the six Presidents of the current session, together with the last President of the previous session and the first of the next session, for their readiness to cooperate and support the Belarusian presidency.

I would like to propose that the schedule for this morning's plenary meeting be as follows. First, I will begin with my statement as President of the Conference, followed by an address by Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, and the introduction of the first draft of the annual report of the Conference, as contained in document CD/WP.629. I will then give the floor to you for your comments on the draft report, in accordance with the rules of procedure for our plenary meeting.

Allow me now to deliver a statement on the occasion of the first plenary meeting under the presidency of Belarus.

Ladies and gentlemen, 2020 has not been an ordinary or easy year for the Conference on Disarmament, for a number of reasons. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a markedly negative impact on our work and on our lives outside of work. Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that in 2020, there has been a continued deterioration of key elements of the international security system. The Conference itself failed to make substantive progress in its work.

However, we would like to emphasize the positive experience of the Conference's group format for the presidency, which includes the six Presidents of the ongoing session, the last President of the previous session and the first of the subsequent session. I have a privileged vantage point from which to appreciate the constructivism and support of my colleagues. This was particularly evident in the discussion and formulation of the draft programmes of work of the Conference, both of which were the outcome of intense, joint efforts and were therefore submitted to the Conference on behalf of the entire group of Presidents. This year we came very close to adopting a programme of work. I am convinced that, maintaining the constructive approaches adopted by the group of Presidents, combined with the pragmatism, flexibility and commitment to the Conference's goals on the part of the member States, we will be able to take this crucial step next year.

The year 2020 marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the thirty-second anniversary of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. We should be inspired by these milestones and redouble our common efforts. The starting point for such efforts should be a consensus on the report of the 2020 session of the Conference. The Belarusian presidency considers the adoption of the report to be of the highest priority and therefore intends to devote two of the three plenary meetings to it, including today's meeting. I will present a first version of the draft report a little later today, in a separate statement.

We intend to devote another plenary meeting, on 8 September, to a thematic discussion on new weapons of mass destruction. We are convinced that this topic is relevant to the current development of new weapons and delivery systems. In this context, an assessment is required of the impact of scientific and technological developments on the prospects for new weapons of mass destruction, or for any new weapons that are comparable in their destructive power. The Belarusian delegation has previously submitted its proposals on this topic to the Conference and believes that they remain relevant. The resolutions sponsored by Belarus at the United Nations General Assembly on the prohibition of the development and production of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems

of such weapons are also as relevant as ever. We intend to submit the relevant draft resolution in the First Committee during the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. We call upon all members of the Conference and all Members of the United Nations to support our draft resolution in New York.

We hope for fruitful discussions in today's plenary session, in the plenary sessions on 8 and 15 September and in all informal and unofficial meetings, and in general we look forward to working together closely over the next four weeks. I thank you for your attention.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to give the floor to Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, the Secretary-General of our Conference. Tatiana Dmitrievna, you have the floor.

**Ms. Valovaya** (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, I am pleased to be with you today for the first plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament this year dedicated to the report of the Conference to the General Assembly, a time to look back over the 2020 session and reflect on the outlook for 2021. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has taken a heavy toll on all aspects of our lives, and international diplomacy and intergovernmental bodies are no exception.

It would be reasonable to think that our work was upended when the pandemic put a halt on meetings at the Palais des Nations for a few months, and it would be understandable if we were to cast the work of the Conference this year in that light. It is also a fact that, this year once again, the Conference has been unable to adopt a programme of work or implement its core negotiating mandate.

However, I would be remiss if I did not recall the efforts undertaken by the members and presidencies of the Conference throughout 2020. Those efforts should be drawn on to help establish an environment in which the purpose of this body can start to be realized again, as we look forward to 2021. From the outset, we saw strong cooperation among the six Presidents, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session. I believe this was a very positive development. This informal mechanism has allowed for continuity during 2020, with some interesting proposals emerging on ways to conceive a programme of work.

It allows for continuity not only between sessions but also between presidencies, strengthening the stewardship of the Conference beyond what a single president can achieve, rendering obsolete the invisible four-week timeline that a single President may feel bound to, and amplifying the collective ownership of what the Conference may achieve beyond individual presidencies and possibly across regional groups. I am, therefore, pleased to learn that the 2021 presidencies intend to continue on this path and have already started coordinating.

This year also saw constructive discussions on a package containing a promising draft proposal for a programme of work, put forward by the six Presidents under the presidencies of Algeria and then Argentina. Although it did not ultimately elicit the agreement of all, I believe it was a creative attempt to find a way to review work in a manner that reflected a broad spectrum of priorities and interests.

I further wish to recall the "framing questions" initiative, under the presidency of Australia, the results of which are captured in an official document of the Conference. That exercise made it possible to take a snapshot of the priorities of the different Conference members and of the views on ways of breaking the current deadlock and becoming more effective. It also allowed diverse opinions to be expressed in order to build consensus for negotiations, including regarding the possibility of the Conference considering softer instruments.

Another important initiative this year was the Australian non-paper suggesting a technical amendment to make the rules of procedure gender-neutral. As a gender champion, I fully support this effort. Addressing gender-insensitive rules of procedure should be as automatic as the correction of a spelling mistake. This issue, seemingly purely editorial, carries profound meaning for equality among genders and respect for diversity. It is my hope that this proposal will be further pursued in 2021.

Finally, allow me to mention the event co-convened with the Austrian presidency, during which the members of the Conference on Disarmament and civil society representatives discussed the nexus between disarmament, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian objectives, as well as global security in the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 contexts. These types of exchange can provide a useful contribution to the work of the Conference. I strongly encourage the member States that will take the presidency in 2021 to take further ownership of such initiatives, which I will continue to support.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, the members of this Conference have demonstrated their determination to continue working together. Virtual meetings of the six presidencies, with regional coordinators, and of regional groups continued throughout the lockdown, and the approach taken to some of the initiatives I mentioned was quickly adapted to the novel situation.

Against all odds and in spite of resource constraints, the Conference is one of the few disarmament bodies that has resumed formal meetings, first under the Austrian presidency, then under the presidency of Bangladesh and now under the presidency of Belarus. While the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament is not over yet, I think it already provides ample food for thought for 2021. It is unrealistic to expect an immediate start to negotiations on any of the core agenda items.

So, while proposals for a schedule of work for the Conference continue to be discussed, engagement with civil society and other initiatives can help move away from heated exchanges towards greater cooperation, information-sharing and trust building – all necessary to lay the groundwork for negotiations to take place. Throughout the year, I have heard references to agreements on codes of conduct and other confidence-building measures.

Reference was made to initiatives to ensure peace and security in outer space and to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which is a long-term outstanding core agenda item of this Conference. Positions were voiced on a fissile material cut-off treaty, or fissile material treaty, on negative security assurances and on nuclear disarmament. Each of these items encapsulates subtopics that could be explored further and progressively.

Some of you suggested discussions on nuclear risk reduction, nuclear disarmament verification, new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons, or, more broadly, the cross-cutting impact of emerging technologies on each of the agenda items and on international arms control and non-proliferation. While you discuss and ultimately decide on the issues that you wish to address in this forum in 2021, I encourage you to explore any avenue that may increase confidence and prepare the ground for progressive substantive work.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, the Secretary-General, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and I have drawn your attention to the dangerous trends we are witnessing today – from a renewed reliance on nuclear weapons for security and stability to a marked shift in the global security landscape, to new means of warfare that largely lack regulatory frameworks and to the erosion of the disarmament regime.

Upcoming review conferences of important disarmament instruments, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, will provide opportunities to home in on specific issues and strengthen existing regimes. The Conference on Disarmament also needs to do its part.

We do not know how the COVID-19 situation will evolve. While we all aspire to a return to normalcy, we should take advantage of the fact that participation in the Conference on Disarmament does not generally require international travel. It is therefore less susceptible to the unforeseen circumstances that we see in other forums.

Looking forward to 2021, we hope that in-person meetings will remain possible, while we will maintain the possibility of meeting in hybrid formats. Member States should, however, be mindful that the financial limitations that we face today, and on which your Permanent Missions will hear more during the briefing this afternoon, are likely to persist.

I invite you to consider these realities as you plan for your work in 2021. Any early, if tentative, outline of what are likely to be your activities can help preparedness on our side, so that we can do the necessary to accommodate your requirements to the extent possible. I wish you all the best for productive deliberations on the report to the General Assembly and fruitful discussions during the thematic plenary meeting planned for 8 September. Thank you.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Madam Secretary-General, for the support you have given to all the presidencies and, in particular, the presidency of the Republic of Belarus. We also thank you for the hopes you have expressed, for your inspiring attitude, for your analysis and for the work done by all the technical services under your supervision, and for their contribution to our work throughout the year, in particular during our forthcoming meetings.

Allow me now to present the first draft of the report of the Conference on Disarmament. As noted, the adoption of the report is our primary focus. We thus made an effort to send a document to the members of the Conference at the very beginning of the Belarusian presidency.

Before turning to the substance of the draft report, I would like to mention two issues that relate to the logistics of our work on it. You will all remember that today and on 8 and 15 September, we will be using a hybrid format for our meetings. The hybrid meeting format, which is required because some delegations have decided to join us remotely, involves certain limitations. Thus, we have planned just three plenary meetings, each of which will be three hours long, and each of them has been scheduled in a hybrid format. This is the maximum that we are able to use, first and foremost, among other things, based on the available budgetary resources. The hybrid format involves the additional costs of using an external platform, provided by an external organization, of connecting delegations wishing to participate remotely and of providing a common, publicly accessible webcast for those wishing to follow our formal discussions. I must emphasize my intention and my call to you to use the time available to us to the best possible effect, and to work exclusively on the report.

If, as I emphasized earlier, the Conference encounters difficulties in adopting the final document of our work, we will not be able, in contrast to what we have been able to do in past years, to convene additional plenary meetings. In this connection, I would like to state straight away that the Belarusian presidency is ready to hold all the informal consultations that are required: bilateral, multilateral, by telephone, email, directly at the level of heads of the permanent missions, or through experts. We are prepared to work together in any format if it will contribute to finding a consensus on the draft document.

There is another important procedural difference related to the hybrid format. Switching between formal and informal plenary meetings is no longer so simple or easy and cannot be done automatically or quickly. We face a number of constraints and factors relating to security, logistical and budgetary considerations that present obstacles to using this method of work. I therefore encourage everyone to assume that the plenary meeting is a formal meeting.

We were aware of the realities of the 2020 session of the Conference and so our philosophy in drafting the report was to treat it as a technical document that reflects the facts and refrains as much as possible from using subjective assessments and ambiguous language.

The structure of the draft report follows established practice. In the section on the organization of the work of the Conference, we provide, *inter alia*, information on attendance by its members and its observers, on the high-level segment, on the adoption of the Conference's agenda and on the efforts to adopt a programme of work. In the same section, we have included an item reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our work. This section also reflects the Conference's discussions on expanding the membership and improving the functioning of the Conference. The next section, which is devoted to substantive work, covers the work of the Conference on its agenda items and contains lists of the relevant documents. The report concludes with the adoption of the report and the schedule for the Conference's 2021 session.

I would also like to share some preliminary plans regarding the relevant draft resolution of the General Assembly, which should adopt our report in New York. For now, we intend to follow an approach involving a technical update to last year's resolution. We will convene consultations on this issue once the work on the report of the Conference has been completed.

I would now like to give the floor to delegations for any comments or remarks that they would like to make on the draft report that we circulated the day before yesterday. I propose that we make the best use of the time available to us. Once again, I would draw your attention to the exceptional time constraints this year, on the understanding that unofficial, informal consultations, without interpretation, in their customary form, in English, will be available to the Conference. However, we will also face limitations in relation to the time required by the secretariat to find appropriate rooms, in part owing to physical distancing standards. Thank you very much for your attention.

I now open the debate. The first speaker on my list is the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, Mr. Andrey Belousov. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Belousov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like at the outset to congratulate the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations Office at Geneva on his assumption of the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure him of the full cooperation and support of the Russian delegation.

Dear colleagues, we are approaching the final stage of the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament, which will surely be remembered as the most unusual in decades because of the almost three-month suspension of activity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the session started with intensive work by all delegations on the package proposed by the six Presidents of the session, and we hope that it will end on a purposeful note. I would like to express our gratitude to the Belarusian presidency for preparing a good draft of the Conference's report to the United Nations General Assembly. We believe that, on the whole, it objectively reflects the activity of the Conference during the period under review and is based on facts. We believe that we should all aim to promptly finalize the text, taking into account possible technical comments and suggestions from member States, to arrive at a consensus on the document as soon as possible.

The pandemic has brought to the forefront the full range of challenges facing the international disarmament community. But who would have thought that our common enemy would be the unpredictability and inability to plan ahead and structure our work in advance? We had become accustomed to working this way over a period of decades. The only constant that we were left with in this difficult situation was the well-established mechanism whereby the presidency was shared by the group of the six Presidents of the current session, together with the last President of the previous session and the first of the forthcoming one. That mechanism is multilateralism in action, and evidence of how problems, even if they are only of a technical nature, can be solved collectively. We believe it is important to continue along this path. The Conference has a lot to do. It has the most urgent international security issues on its agenda. In our view, raising issues at this forum that are not directly related to its mandate, or attempting to use them for political purposes, creates artificial obstacles to the performance of this important task.

To ensure that the Conference would not be reproached for being selective or exclusive, its founders provided a mechanism to allow observers to fully participate in its substantive work. The Russian position on this issue is very clear: any Member State of the United Nations has a right to participate as an observer. We see in this yet another manifestation of the genuine multilateralism and democracy on which the entire United Nations system is based. Attempts to restrict that right undermine the inclination of delegations to resolve the substantive issues of the Conference that are so crucial to making it effective.

In our view, all these points, which are matters of principle for the Russian delegation, have been taken into account in the draft of the Conference's report to the General Assembly that has been presented. The report only needs a little technical tweaking. In the current circumstances, including the financial situation, we cannot afford to spend hours on

exhausting debates, and we therefore appeal to all delegations to show maximum flexibility and a willingness to achieve consensus. Our delegation is prepared to do so. We will bring our proposals for minor adjustments to individual provisions of the draft to the attention of the delegation of Belarus in the working meetings.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of the Russian Federation and give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Aala** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to congratulate you, Ambassador Yury Ambrazevich, on your assumption of the sixth presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for 2020, and to assure you of our full support. We are confident that your extensive experience and the distinguished role of Belarus in the field of disarmament will make an important contribution to the work of the Conference and the adoption of its annual report to the General Assembly. We welcome the presence of the Secretary-General of the Conference, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, and thank her for her statement. We also extend thanks to the secretariat of the Conference for its efforts.

Mr. President, the work of the current session has been adversely affected by the exceptional circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the complexities of the international security environment and the excessive politicization that continues to prevent us from making progress in agreeing a programme of work that allows the Conference to resume its mandate as the only multilateral international negotiating forum on disarmament, despite the serious efforts of your predecessors in the presidency of the Conference, which we commend. This reality and the budgetary constraints facing the United Nations mean that there is little that we can do on substantive matters during the remainder of the current session. We therefore welcome the course of action that you outlined in your introductory statement this morning, and hope that, during your presidency, the Conference will be able to restore an atmosphere that is conducive to multilateral professional work and to reach a consensus on the adoption of a factual annual report that reflects what is happening and is guided by the reports that have already been adopted in recent years. My delegation stresses the importance of ensuring that, in our work and our deliberations, we adhere to the rules of procedure and the governing principles on which they are based, first and foremost the principle of equal sovereignty of States. Our delegation reiterates its rejection both of the attempts to politicize the work of the Conference made by certain States that introduce issues that fall outside the mandate and agenda of the Conference and of unconstructive practices that harm the Conference's substantive work and the chances of reaching a consensus on ways to break the current stalemate.

We thank you, Mr. President, for the proposed draft annual report that was distributed to us two days ago. We confirm our readiness to work closely with you on it and on the draft resolution that will be submitted to the General Assembly and look forward to consultations with you.

My delegation has read the draft annual report with interest and sees it as a good basis for arriving at a consensus. We will make specific comments on it in due course.

By way of general remarks, we support the adoption of a concise and factual document that reflects the outcome of consultations with member States and accurately reflects what has happened during this year's session. While we appreciate the initiatives and working methods adopted by the successive presidencies in 2020, we advise caution when it comes to including in the report any positions put forward by individual States on which specific decisions have not been adopted by the Conference.

For the sake of transparency, the document presented for negotiation at the Conference must contain all relevant information, including the list of official documents to be annexed to the report, so as to ensure that the annual report and its annexes do not contain anything that has been added subsequent to its adoption by the Conference, as has happened previously.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate that you can count on our support in your successful efforts as president of the Conference. Thank you, Mr. President.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the distinguished Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement and for his support, and I give

the floor to Mr. Robert Wood, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the Conference on Disarmament, who will join us remotely.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America) (*via video link*): Thank you, Mr. President. On behalf of the United States, I congratulate you on your assumption of the Conference on Disarmament presidency and assure you of my delegation's support as you guide us to the closure of the 2020 session. You have an unenviable task in these unprecedented times, and we are grateful for your leadership.

I also want to thank you for the draft final report that you have introduced in your capacity as President of the Conference. We think it is a good report; I may have some minor edits to suggest, but I look forward to sharing those with you in the coming days. As I stated at our last plenary meeting, the United States supports a technical report. We look forward to discussions on the report and recommend that it be adopted under the silence procedure.

As several of my colleagues have stated, the Conference on Disarmament's finances and the impact on our ability to hold plenary meetings are of serious concern. We need clarity on the budget status, expenditures and expected costs for both this year and next year. As much as we all wish we could operate in the 2021 session as we did before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we need to be realistic and plan for a new normal. As I have said before, the United States believes that hybrid options need to exist while COVID-19 remains a significant concern to all nations, and they certainly need to exist for any meetings held in New York.

I want to thank Director-General Valovaya for her briefing to the member States on these matters, which is scheduled to take place later today. My delegation will be participating in those discussions. We have communicated with our colleagues in New York on the issue, as we have no indications of similar budget constraints at the United Nations Headquarters.

Looking towards next year, the United States concurs with those delegations that have expressed frustration at the inability of the Conference on Disarmament to move forward, substantially, or even procedurally. We also appreciate the suggestions made by several delegations for tangible steps that we could take. For example, the United States continues to support negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, as mentioned by my colleagues from Japan and the Republic of Korea.

In the COVID-19 era, when in-person meetings can put lives in danger and travel is unpredictable at best, we must cast a discerning look at how this body can operate in a creative and innovative manner. And the need to move beyond business as usual will certainly be a requisite for the First Committee of the General Assembly and for a successful Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2021.

Mr. President, I have long advocated a review of how the Conference on Disarmament works, which may be even more pressing now in the new environment. I look forward to further consultations on ways of bringing the Conference on Disarmament into the twenty-first century – or, at a minimum, into the twentieth.

These are tumultuous times, Mr. President, and dialogue and open-line communications are more important than ever. We also need to take a collective deep breath and be realistic in moving forward as efficiently as possible. To that end, we thank you again for the draft technical report produced by Belarus and reiterate our suggestion that the Conference on Disarmament adopt it under the silence procedure.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his statement and for his support and proposals. They will all certainly be studied. I think that the secretariat will, in due course, find an opportunity to inform us on a question of interest to us all, both on budgetary matters for 2020 and on plans for 2021, and about what is required to ensure that we always have a hybrid format of work at our disposal. I now give the floor to the delegation of the Republic of Korea. Ambassador, you have the floor.

**Mr. Lim** Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, I would like to extend my congratulations to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on



Disarmament. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. My delegation would also like to join other colleagues in appreciating the efforts of the President and his team, along with the secretariat, in preparing the draft report of the Conference, as circulated on 25 August.

My delegation believes that the unprecedented circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic require us to take a practical and pragmatic approach in finalizing this year's report. In this spirit, we believe that this draft report constitutes a good and solid foundation, duly reflecting the facts as well as the reality that we face. Nevertheless, it is still regrettable that we will not have had substantive reports for three consecutive years. I hope that the year 2021 will represent a fresh start in this regard.

Taking particular account of the financial situation of the Conference on Disarmament secretariat, I hope that the remaining weeks are spent working efficiently and effectively, so that we reach a consensus on the report.

Mr. President, as we are still studying the draft report, we would like to submit a technical comment and any questions that we have in written form in due course. However, today I would like to share with you two of my delegation's preliminary observations.

First, my delegation takes note that reference is made in the draft text, in the section on improved and effective functioning of the Conference, to document CD/2198, entitled "Australian proposal to make the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure gender-neutral". We believe that this is a vitally important part of our deliberations this year and hope that it will be further utilized and come to full fruition in the coming year.

Second, I would like to refer to the possible scheduling conflict that may occur next year, outlined in paragraph 49, with the upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the date of which is yet to be finalized. While we should wait for some weeks for further clarification from the United Nations Secretariat on the logistical arrangements for the Review Conference, it would be highly appreciated if the six Presidents of the 2021 session might begin consultations aimed at coming up with a practical and creative solution, which should also be in line with the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament. I thank you, Mr. President.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his comment. We are available to work with you on the basis of your written comments and of course with any questions of an oral nature. I shall now give the floor to the delegation of Spain.

**Mr. Manglano Aboín** (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. First, allow me to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You can count on my delegation's full support and sincere cooperation over the coming weeks.

I will not dwell on the number of meetings and hours that we have left in this session to assemble, to negotiate, to debate and to do our work. Spain thanks the Belarusian presidency for the draft annual report that was circulated last Tuesday. We take the positive view that this is a comprehensive and detailed draft that can easily be accepted by all members of this Conference. However, and as we stated at around this time last year, we believe that the purely factual nature of the draft reveals the poverty of our ambitions.

The wish of my delegation, just as it was last year, is to adopt a report full of references to negotiations and agreements, but our discussions have not attained that stature and we continued to be rooted in purely procedural digressions that reflect an unwillingness to take on the real mandate of this Conference.

In this context, my delegation would like to make some preliminary suggestions. In particular, we regret the absence of two references that we believe would help improve the report so that it effectively and efficiently serves its purpose, which is to duly inform the General Assembly of what has happened in this forum over the course of the year.

First, we believe that a reference should be made to the online event entitled "Conference on Disarmament meets civil society", which the Austrian presidency, to its great credit, organized on 3 July 2020. We are aware that this online event was not one of the

Conference's meetings, but perhaps mentioning it in the report could help to illustrate what the Conference has done in recent months, at a time when it has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We invite the presidency to consider including such a mention.

Second, we believe that some of the references to the impact of the pandemic on the Conference's work should be put into their proper context. The year 2020 is proving to be a year full of new challenges for all, including this Conference. As the draft states, the work of the Conference has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the reduction in the number of meetings and the alteration of their format. Indeed, multilateralism has been constrained by a lack of contact: meetings have been cancelled or postponed, and virtual formats and online contacts do not produce the same results as face-to-face meetings. Hybrid and online meetings have been useful for keeping the work of the Conference alive but have proved not to be the best solution for the continuation of our efforts.

For this reason, we think that paragraph 4 of the current draft, which mentions that hybrid and virtual formats have proved to be an effective tool for preserving the Conference's work in the pandemic situation should state that while they have indeed been an effective tool, they have been insufficient; in other words, that they are "an effective but insufficient tool". Spain believes that the report should illustrate to the General Assembly the reality of what has occurred, and this small amendment, which in fact implies some self-criticism, would help to achieve that end. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Spain for its statement. We look forward to receiving your specific proposals in writing, especially those mentioned in the last part of your statement, so that we can make use of them. I now give the floor to the delegation of Indonesia.

**Mr. Rosandry** (Indonesia): Thank you, Mr. President. On behalf of the Indonesian delegation, let me begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Rest assured of my country's continued support for your presidency and this esteemed Conference. We also would like to commend Ambassador Shameem Ahsan and his team for their relentless efforts and able stewardship during the presidency of Bangladesh.

Mr. President, we take note with appreciation of the draft annual report presented to us. We will study it and provide our input as soon as possible. Our preliminary view is that it is not an easy task to retain the relevance of the Conference on Disarmament. We understand that the member States' priorities in the Conference on Disarmament have remained unchanged for a long time. And moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to the work of the Conference this year. However, Indonesia believes that there is still room for the Conference on Disarmament to move forward and contribute to the maintenance of peace and security. I recall that, in previous Conference on Disarmament sessions, some delegations put forward ideas and suggestions on the future work of the Conference.

In this regard, Indonesia would like to reiterate the importance of the discussion on negative security assurances as a potential low-hanging fruit that the Conference on Disarmament may consider. The establishment of negative security assurances is very reasonable goal, especially considering that it was part of the grand bargain when we agreed on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons fifty years ago. It is therefore very logical that we should be calling for an early agreement on effective, unconditional, non-discriminatory and irrevocable legally binding negative security assurances. We take note of the divergent views on negative security assurances, but we should also bear in mind the various efforts that have been made to address this issue.

In light of this, Indonesia would like to encourage the Conference on Disarmament to consider an arrangement that provides for simultaneous discussions on negative security assurances, nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and a fissile material cut-off treaty.

Mr. President, while recognizing the challenges of the current year for the Conference on Disarmament, we also see the merit of highlighting the following encouraging notes.

First, the package that Conference on Disarmament produced this year could be a useful basis for next year's deliberations, meaning that we will not have to go back to square one.

Second, the approach adopted by the six Presidents of the current session should be preserved during next year's session. We hope that the current six Presidents will lend support to the six Presidents of next year's session in order to ensure continuity in the Conference on Disarmament process.

And I would also like to take this opportunity to put on record Indonesia's support for the proposal made by Australia for a technical amendment to the rules of procedure to render the language gender-neutral. We hope that we will enjoy consensus in the future work of the Conference on Disarmament.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you to the delegation of Indonesia for your statement, and I give the floor to Mr. Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the Conference on Disarmament.

**Mr. Liddle** (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to congratulate you, as others have, on your assumption of the presidency and assure you of my delegation's full support. Let me also thank you very much for the draft report which you presented to us this morning. My delegation considers that it is an extremely good basis for further work and, as other colleagues have said this morning, I very much hope that it can be adopted quickly and smoothly, without unnecessary delay.

That said, there are one or two editorial changes that my delegation will propose – we will share them with you in writing – particularly on paragraph 4 and on the title of the British Minister who spoke at the high-level segment in paragraph 7. I did want to make one more substantive point, although I hope it is not a particularly difficult or controversial one; it picks up on the point that my Spanish colleague made earlier. Paragraph 4 rather implies that, with the introduction of hybrid methods of working, we are able to continue as if nothing had happened, but that is not the case, of course. We would therefore like to propose an additional sentence, which would note that the Conference was unable to convene plenary meetings between 10 March and 30 June, which represented the entirety of the Australian presidency and three quarters of the Austrian presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We could also reflect some of the excellent work that those two presidencies did, despite being unable to convene formal plenary meetings – although, as others have mentioned, the Australian non-paper is mentioned elsewhere. I think it is very important that we reflect the fact that the Conference was unable to conduct its formal work for quite some time, despite the introduction later on of hybrid technology, which has enabled us to at least wrap up our work at the end of the session.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador for his comment. We look forward to receiving your ideas in writing on how to elaborate on this reality that we are facing, so that we can make use of them in reaching a position of consensus. I now give the floor to the delegation of Belgium.

**Ms. Marchand** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me first congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in your efforts to achieve the adoption of a final report for the Conference and assure you of my delegation's full support to that end. I would also like to thank the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Conference on Disarmament, Ms. Valovaya, for her much-appreciated statement and recommendations.

This has been a very strange year for the Conference, beginning very promisingly with a constructive dynamic that revived a hope that perhaps this year the Conference would manage to adopt a programme of work. Unfortunately, events would have it otherwise. Mr. President, you now have the heavy burden of getting the final report on our work adopted after the difficult events of the past few months.

In this regard, we would like to express our thanks for the draft report you circulated this week. My capital will consider it with a constructive mindset. I can already tell you that my delegation supports the mention in paragraph 11 of the request of Cyprus to participate as an observer in our work.

My country is strongly committed to inclusiveness and transparency in our work and to allowing States that are not yet members of the Conference to follow it. In this respect, we hope that all the requests by non-member States to participate in our work will receive universal support next year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank each of the six Presidents of the session for their much-appreciated efforts, for the opportunity they gave us to participate in the work they conducted in cooperation with the last President of the previous session and the first President of the next session and for their determination to continue our work in what are extremely challenging conditions.

We would also like to thank Australia for its very useful document summarizing the outcome of its consultations this year and for its proposal to make the rules of procedure gender-neutral. These initiatives will certainly be very helpful for our work next year.

In September, as soon as our work ends, it will be my country's turn to take up the baton. First, during the intersessional period, we will hold a series of consultations. We will then work in close collaboration with next year's five other Presidents and in consultation with the outgoing presidency of this year and the incoming presidency for 2022 to prepare the work of the Conference under our presidency, which will begin on 18 January 2021.

We are delighted to be presiding over the work of the Conference and, as a member of the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session, to be beginning fruitful cooperation, which we hope will allow the Conference to resume substantive work. Thank you.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank the Belgian delegation for its statement.

(*spoke in Russian*)

Distinguished colleagues, I now give the floor to Ambassador Li, the Permanent Representative of China to the Conference on Disarmament.

**Mr. Li Song** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, I would like to offer our warm congratulations to the delegation of Belarus as it assumes the rotating presidency of the Conference. We will, as always, support the work of the President.

I fully agree with every colleague who spoke just before me. You have provided us with a very good draft for this year's report of the Conference. It provides an excellent basis, especially in this special year. My delegation will actively and constructively take part in the consultations on this report and will work with you to formulate a factual, technical report, so that on this basis we can draw up a draft resolution to submit to the First Committee of the General Assembly, to jointly formulate a draft resolution on the Conference on Disarmament for the First Committee. With regard to this draft report, I have just one preliminary suggestion. On the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations this year, perhaps we may consider using some very plain and simple language in the report to reflect the support of the Conference's member States for multilateralism and international solidarity and cooperation.

Just now, in their interventions, everyone mentioned the model of the presidency whereby the six Presidents of the current session work together with the last President of the previous session and the first of the next session. Like everyone else, I think this mechanism works quite well, which in itself represents real progress made by the Conference on Disarmament to improve its working methods and effectiveness, thanks to all of our joint efforts. I hope this format will continue to function well next year so that the work of the Conference can move ahead smoothly and in an orderly fashion. Thank you, Mr. President.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you to the delegation of China for your statement, and I give the floor to Ambassador Hwang, the Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament.

**Mr. Hwang** (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. Good morning, all. Mr. President, I would first like to warmly congratulate you on your assumption of this important office. My delegation is pleased to be in your highly capable hands.

Thank you also for informing us of the way in which we will consider the report of the Conference on Disarmament to the General Assembly. This is an important annual exercise, and you can of course count on my delegation's support to ensure the best possible conditions for the process and help us achieve quick results.

Mr. President, you told us we had financial constraints with regard to hybrid meetings. My delegation still thinks that nothing is stopping us – I repeat, objectively there is nothing stopping us – from resuming normal in-person work, if necessary. I therefore call upon the presidency and the secretariat to consider this option if the negotiation of this report becomes difficult. I will say the same thing this afternoon at the meeting organized by the United Nations Office at Geneva, to which Ms. Tatiana Valovaya invited all the delegations this morning.

I will be brief. As regards the substance of the draft report circulated to us – and first let me thank you, as it is a good report and an excellent basis for negotiations – we do not have specific difficulties with any of the paragraphs. However, having listened to some of my colleagues who spoke before me, I do think that it would be worth rewriting paragraph 4. I think that my delegation will be able to submit formal proposals fairly quickly. Paragraph 4, as written, does seem to normalize the use of hybrid meeting formats, including for 2021, whereas we think that such formats should be avoided and that the draft and the wording proposed in it are counterproductive in that respect.

Moreover, paragraph 4 does not reflect the quality of the discussions that took place at the last official meeting of the Conference, particularly as regards the financial situation of this institution. At the last meeting of the Conference, many delegations called for greater financial transparency, and I think that that is something that should be taken into account in paragraph 4.

On another subject, paragraph 11 is particularly important this year. I would therefore like to express my full support for what my Russian colleague said at the start of the meeting and what my Belgian colleague has said as well. Paragraph 11 as it stands is acceptable, but anything less than that wording would be problematic for my country.

Mr. President, I wish you every success and assure you that my delegation will support you in your efforts.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): Thank you, France.

(*spoke in Russian*)

I shall now give the floor to the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Azadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation would like to congratulate Belarus, and you yourself, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our full support and cooperation.

Mr. President, while we affirm the role and the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral negotiating forum devoted to disarmament, we urge all the Conference on Disarmament members that uphold the role of the law, the rule of law, the international law-based order and multilateralism to demonstrate political will in order to safeguard the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament and adopt a comprehensive, balanced and inclusive programme of work on the four core issues in next year's session, in accordance with the Final Document of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

As we approach the end of the 2020 session, we regret that the Conference on Disarmament has failed to break its long stalemate due to a lack of political will and sense of responsibility on the part of certain nuclear weapon actors. However, we commend the efforts of all the Presidents of the 2020 session on their efforts to bridge the gaps and help conclude a balanced and comprehensive programme of work. We all need to continue our endeavours to turn the Conference on Disarmament into a productive and effective body on nuclear disarmament. We understand that that will not be easy because of the continued dominance of radical unilateralism in international relations, which has negatively affected many multilateral institutions, including this body. No State that values international law, the rule

of law at international level and international peace and security can remain indifferent to this destructive and malign approach.

Mr. President, my delegation is studying the draft report and will offer its comments as soon as they are as finalized.

**Mr. President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his comment. As with all the other delegations that have taken the floor or wish to take the floor, we are counting on you to be constructive as we work with you. In this connection, I see that the delegation of Pakistan has requested the floor. You have the floor.

**Mr. Omar** (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. I congratulate you and Belarus on assuming the presidency of the Conference and assure you of my delegation's full support as you guide our work in the coming weeks. We welcome the collaborative approach of the six Presidents throughout the year and the efforts by each of them to contribute to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

We also welcome your approach for the coming weeks and look forward to working with you and all members on the report of the Conference and its resolution to the General Assembly.

Thank you for sharing the draft report, which we see as a good effort to factually capture the Conference's work this year. We continue to support a factual and technical report that would enable us to efficiently finalize our work for the year. My delegation also has a couple of technical points regarding the draft report that we will share with you bilaterally.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Pakistan and would like to give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

**Mr. Han** Tae-song (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to begin by joining previous speakers in congratulating you on your assumption of the final presidency of the Conference on Disarmament this year. I can assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

My delegation also fully appreciates the very active efforts of your team and the secretariat in preparing the draft report. We will fully study the draft report and then transmit our opinions. I think the report includes all the views, concerns and constructive opinions expressed by all member States on how to make the Conference on Disarmament move forward.

Mr. President, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is consistent in its opposition to any politicization of the work of the Conference on Disarmament; this is not the right place to deal with such issues. I therefore hope that, during your presidency, we will concentrate all our efforts on substantive issues of importance to disarmament; we must counter any attempt to raise issues related to the internal affairs of individual countries. If such practice is allowed, it will undoubtedly undermine the credibility of the Conference and exacerbate the division and confrontation among its member States.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Ambassador, for your statement and for your support.

Dear colleagues, we have gone through the list of delegations wishing to comment on the draft report. Does anyone else wish to take the floor? I recognize the delegation of Algeria. You have the floor.

**Mr. Berkat** (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country's delegation would like to join others in congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our support in preparing the final report for this session and contributing to advancing the work of our Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your active role within the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, and the spirit of cooperation that has prevailed in the work of the group. Thanks to the group's integrated work and the synergy of the efforts of its various members, this year we have been able to lay an additional building block on the path

to reaching a consensus. We believe that this consensus is still possible. It was within reach at the beginning of this year, and we believe that, with collective action, we will achieve it soon. We look forward to working with you as we complete negotiations and work on the final report. We also look forward to working with the next presidencies, notably the presidency of Belgium, to move forward and consult on what can be added to the work of this Conference.

Thank you very much.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Algeria for its support and cooperation. I would now like to continue the discussion. I see that the delegation of Mexico has also requested the floor. You have the floor.

**Mr. Martínez Ruiz** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Ambrazevich, on assuming the presidency of this forum and to assure you of my delegation's cooperation in the hope that your tenure will be a successful one.

We are grateful for the presentation of the first draft of the report, which we believe provides an objective summary of the work of the Conference on Disarmament this year. Without prejudice to the comments that we might wish to share after my capital has studied the draft in more detail, we think it is a good basis upon which to proceed.

We also think it is reasonable to support some of the proposals to recognize the value of the Conference as a forum, taking into account the important anniversaries this year of the United Nations and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Such proposals could lead to our holding more extensive discussions about the reforms needed to make the Conference an effective and efficient forum, or even to a proper review of the Conference at a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

We will continue to follow up on the new versions of the report and to work with you in a flexible spirit so that it can be adopted as soon as possible. Thank you very much.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of Mexico for his statement.

Dear colleagues, is there anyone else who would like to directly address the topic of the report? Are there any delegations wishing to speak on any other matters? We have noted one delegation, the delegation of Kazakhstan. You have the floor.

**Mr. Baissuanov** (Kazakhstan): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference and express our delegation's full readiness to assist you in fulfilling this important duty. We also wish to commend the coordinated work done by the six Presidents aimed at resuming substantive discussions of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, I wish to draw your attention to the decision taken by the General Assembly to declare 29 August the International Day against Nuclear Tests, a day devoted to enhancing public awareness and education about the effects of nuclear-weapon test explosions and the need for their cessation as one way of achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The date of 29 August is of special significance in the history of Kazakhstan – it was on this day in 1949 that the first Soviet nuclear device was detonated at the Semipalatinsk test site. On the same day in 1991, following a massive anti-nuclear movement, the first President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, issued a decree on closing down the largest nuclear test site in the world. Later, he commented on that decision, saying: “We legally stopped the most sinister experiment of militarism, which had been tormenting our land and our people for almost forty years”.

Kazakhstan set an example that was followed by others and eventually led to the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We fully share the view of Secretary-General Guterres that the legacy of nuclear testing is “nothing but destruction”. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is vital to ensuring there are no more victims; it is also essential to advancing nuclear disarmament.

Therefore, we use the International Day against Nuclear Tests to reiterate our calls for all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, especially those whose ratification is needed for the Treaty's entry into force.

Furthermore, this day is a valid occasion to remember the sufferings caused by nuclear testing. Millions of victims in various parts of the world were subjected to radioactive contamination resulting in acute and chronic health complications. Studies show that the effects of radiation are passed down from one generation to another. Nuclear testing has a major effect on the environment, destroying ecological systems and severely limiting economic opportunities for the local populations.

Distinguished colleagues, since its independence, Kazakhstan has been a consistent and active advocate of nuclear disarmament. We have voluntarily renounced the deployment of nuclear weapons on our territory. Twenty-five years ago, the last nuclear warheads were removed from our soil and the last nuclear explosive device was destroyed at the Semipalatinsk test site. In 2006, in Semipalatinsk, five Central Asian States signed the Treaty on the establishment of a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone.

The first President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, speaking at the United Nations in September 2015, called upon all Member States to "make the world free of nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century". He proposed eliminating the nuclear menace by the year 2045, to mark the centennial anniversary of the creation of the United Nations.

Last year, on 29 August, Kazakhstan became a party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In the year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, it is important to emphasize that only by joint efforts can we achieve a world free of nuclear threats.

Kazakhstan firmly supports the key role of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a cornerstone of international security and calls for strict compliance by both nuclear and non-nuclear States with their obligations.

Distinguished colleagues, in his speech at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, reiterated that achieving a world free of nuclear weapons remains a top priority for our country. Nuclear weapons are no longer an advantage, but a threat to global peace and stability. Thank you, Mr. President.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of Kazakhstan for his statement.

Dear colleagues, I now turn to you. Are there any other delegations that would like to take the floor at today's plenary meeting? I do not see any, so allow me to state that we have come to the end of our plenary meeting today. I would like to thank you for keeping to constructive work and for the generally positive assessment of our activities. I would also like to express my thanks for the efforts made by all the presidencies this year. Rest assured that we will continue our consultations this week and next week. I invite all the interested parties to send us detailed proposals and wording as soon as possible.

We already have consultations planned with a number of regional groups. As for those regional groups that have not yet organized, we are at your disposal and are awaiting your proposals for such meetings, which we are ready to hold. I would like to emphasize that if necessary, in view of the results of the work which I hope will be carried out between now and Wednesday of next week, inclusive, and based on the proposals that we will receive from you, the presidency will decide to hold unofficial, informal consultations. From the technical standpoint, we have this possibility on both Thursday and Friday. We will do our best not to overlap with the other disarmament-related events to be held late next week here in Geneva, so that all the experts concerned are able to take part, again if necessary, in such unofficial, informal consultations.

I would also like to remind you that the next plenary meeting will be held on 8 September at 10 a.m., when we will have three hours in a hybrid format. The meeting will be devoted to the topic of new types of weapons of mass destruction. We will duly share with



you, as soon as possible, the details of our vision for this event, this meeting and this discussion. I assume that, if necessary, some of the time set aside for this plenary meeting may be used to work on the draft report.

I thank you for today's discussion. I would like to thank the technicians, the interpreters, our secretariat, all the delegates and the Ambassadors. The meeting is adjourned.

*The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.*